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XXIV.

CONNECTION OF DOING RIGHTEOUSNESS WITH BROTHERLY LOVE AS PROVING A DIVINE BIRTH, IN CONTRAST WITH THE UNRIGHTEOUS AND UNLOVING SPIRIT INDICATING A DEVILISH PARENTAGE.

“In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil : whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him ? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.”—1 JOHN iii. 10-12.

THE antagonism between the righteous Father and the great adversary, and between their respective seeds or offsprings, is here announced in such a way as to run it up to a very precise point. The question to which of the two you belong ; which of the two parentages or fatherhoods, God's or the devil's, is really yours ; is brought to a narrow issue. It is put negatively ; and it is all the more searching on that account. The want of righteous doing,—the absence of brotherly love,—is conclusive against your being of God ;—“ Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.” These two things are here virtually identified ; or the one is represented as implying the

other. The general is now made particular ; what was general and abstract—"doing righteousness" (ii. 29), is now reduced to a particular practical test—"loving one's brother." What sort of love is here meant will appear more clearly as we proceed. It is, at any rate, love whose obligation is not of yesterday ; the commandment rendering it obligatory is of old standing, of ancient date : "For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." And the question arises—what message or commandment is here referred to ?

The idea is apt to suggest itself, not unnaturally, that it is our Lord's commandment in the beginning of the gospel : "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another ; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another ;" "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you ;" "These things I command you, that ye love one another" (John xiii. 34, and xvi. 12-17).

But may not "the beginning" be held to date, not from Christ's teaching, but from the real beginning of the gospel, immediately after the fall ? Does not the mention of Cain indicate as much ? Is not the law or message of love in question that which was violated in "the beginning," when "Cain, being of that wicked one, slew his brother?"

God's commandment, heard from the beginning, is that we should love another. Therefore "he that loveth not his brother doeth not righteousness,"—the righteousness required to make good or verify the fact of his being

"born of God." He "committeth or doeth sin;" the sin which is "the transgression of the law." He is "of the devil;"—like Cain, who "was of that wicked one, and slew his brother."

We are thus carried back to the earliest manifestation of the distinction between the children of God and the children of the devil in the old familiar history of Cain and Abel.

Of Abel little is recorded in the history. But it is plainly implied, in what is said of him here, that he "loved his brother." We read that "Cain talked with Abel his brother." And we read this in immediate connection with what the Lord said to Cain on the subject of his rejected offering:—"But unto Cain, and to his offering, he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin"—a sin-offering—"lieth at the door"—at thy disposal, and available for thee. After that, "Cain talked with Abel his brother." It is in that connection that we read of his doing so.

It is not needful to suppose that his talk was, at least in the first instance, a deliberate plot to draw his intended victim into his power. It is quite probable, or rather more than probable, that the conversation began in good faith. The walk of the brothers in the field may have been as much without any purpose on the one side, as without any suspicion on the other, of anything like treachery or violence. It is quite natural that Cain

should have talked with Abel his brother. And the talk might turn on the recent incident of the two acts of worship ; on the disappointment which Cain had experienced, and the explanation of it which the Lord had been pleased to give him. That "Cain was still wroth, and his countenance still fallen," we may well believe. He has not been able to bring himself to submit to God and his righteousness. He is in no mood for being amiable to one who seems to him to be a favoured rival. But he does not meditate actual wrong. He would startle at the thought of fratricide, when the talk with Abel his brother begins.

As it goes on, we may imagine Abel warmly and affectionately enforcing the gospel message which Cain has just got from heaven ; opening up its gracious meaning ; trying to persuade his misjudging brother that there is really no respect of persons with God, no partiality for one above the other ; but that for both alike there is acceptance, as well-doers, if they can claim to stand on that footing, and for both alike, if not well-doers, a sin-offering at the door and at command ;—as near to thee, brother, as to me, as available for thee as for me, as much at thy service as at mine ;—thine, as freely as it is mine, if thou wilt but have it to be thine.

Had I, brother, sought acceptance as a well-doer, needing no atoning blood of the slain lamb, coming merely with a tribute of grateful homage, the Lord would have had as little respect to me and my offering as he had to thee and thine. Nay, less. I must have been more decidedly and justly rejected ; for of sinners

I am chief. But, in my sin, I looked and saw the sin-offering at my door. And, brother, it lieth at thy door too, if thou wilt but consent, as a sinner, to make use of it. Has not our God been telling thee so? Is not this his gospel to thee as well as to me?

Is it too much to conceive of righteous Abel thus manifesting his being of God; thus "doing righteousness and loving his brother?" Is it at all conceivable that he should deal otherwise with his brother, or not deal thus with him, while Cain gave him the opportunity, by talking with him in the field? Could anything else be the burden of the talk than his beseeching his brother to be reconciled to God by the sacrifice of the slain lamb?

And is it not just by his manner of requiting such brotherly dealing with him on the part of Abel that Cain manifests his "being of that wicked one?" Is not that the explanation of his slaying him? For "wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous."

That was the real reason; though of course he did not avow it to himself. Probably he was not conscious of it. He had some plausible plea of self-justification or of self-excuse. His younger brother took too much upon him; affecting to be on a better footing with God than he was, and to be entitled to dictate and prescribe to him. It was bad enough that God should have rejected his plea of well-doing, or of righteousness; and bid him come, not with "God I thank thee," on his proud lips, but with "God be merciful to me a sinner," in his

broken heart. That one who is his junior in age, and in strength so completely at his mercy, should press the same humiliating lesson, is more than he can stand. He cannot reach God ; else his anger would find vent against him. But the meek and unresisting child of God is in his hands. And therefore "he slays him ; because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous."

Well did our Lord say of the Jews who sought to kill him : "Ye are of your father the devil ; and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning." And he was so, "because he abode not in the truth, for there is no truth in him." To lie and hate the truth, is his nature ; "when he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own ;"—it is his native speech, his vernacular ;—for "he is a liar, and the father of it" (John viii. 44). And you are of him ; for it is "because I tell you the truth that ye believe me not" (ver. 45) ; and it is that which provokes you to "seek to kill me" (ver. 40).

Here then are two instances of the children of God being manifested, and the children of the devil : Abel, and his brother Cain who slew him ; Jesus, and the Jews who sought to kill him. It is the first that John cites ; but the second throws light upon it. For Abel is to Cain instead of Jesus ; and Cain is to Abel what he would have been to Jesus. The antagonism is clearly and sharply defined. On the one side there is love, brotherly love ; love to one who slays his lover, and love to him as still a brother,—which is indeed "doing righteousness as God is righteous," and therefore betokens a divine birth. On the other side there is hatred, deadly

hatred ; hatred of the righteous for his righteousness,—which is “a work of the devil,” and savours accordingly of a devilish parentage.

For what brings out the antagonism in both cases is truth or righteousness ; truth, as the Lord puts it (John viii.) ; righteousness, as John puts it here ; the truth of God ; the righteousness of God. Whosoever doeth righteousness is of God ; born of God. And such an one will, like Abel, love his brother ; not sinning, or transgressing the law which commands love to men as brethren. “Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God.” And such an one “loveth not his brother,” but “doeth the work of the devil ;” being like Cain, who “was of that wicked one, and slew his brother, because his own works were evil and his brother’s righteous.”

Mark how these opposite dispositions towards truth and righteousness, the truth and righteousness of God, operate in producing the opposite dispositions of love and hatred.

1. Consider that old message or commandment, heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. On what is it based ? It cannot, since the fall, be based on our joint participation in the ills to which the fall has made us heirs. Companions in guilt, shut up as criminals in the condemned cell, together awaiting execution, can scarcely be expected, need scarcely be exhorted, to love one another. There is not much mutual love lost in a band of outlaws or a community of rebels. “Hateful and hating one another” is apt to be the characteristic of the tribe. They may call one another

brothers, sworn brothers ; in the riot of a common feast, in the presence of a common foe. But there is little real confidence or cordiality in their fellowship. It is not, it cannot be, to guilty and sinful men, in their natural condition of guilt and sinfulness, estranged from God and at enmity with God, that "the message" or commandment "heard from the beginning," to love one another, is now addressed. At least it is not to such that it can be addressed with any hope of its being complied with and obeyed. It is a message or commandment that plainly, from its very nature, proceeds upon the fact of there being a method of extrication, actual or possible, out of that wretched state. It is redemption, and redemption alone, with the regeneration which is involved in it, that makes mutual brotherly love among men, in its true and deep sense, a practicable duty, an attainable grace. It is only one who, "being born of God, doeth righteousness as knowing God to be righteous," that is capable of really loving his fellow-man as a brother. Only righteous Abel can so love even murderous Cain.

If you are the children of the righteous Father, you can so love even those who "despitefully use you and persecute you." For as his children you are one in sympathy with the righteous Father ; you are of one mind with him ; you are on his side in the great cause of righteousness, and of a righteous salvation, which lies so near his heart. Submitting yourselves to his righteous and sovereign grace,—receiving pardon and peace, a new nature and a new life, on the footing of

your oneness with his righteous servant and beloved Son,—you are now, as his children, being born of him, altogether for his righteousness and against the world's sin.

What brotherhood then can there be between you and the men who sin ; and who harden themselves, or justify themselves, in their sin ? Is there not a great gulf between you and them ? Are they not cut off from you ? Are you not precluded from holding them to be your brethren ?

Nay ; it is only now,—now for the first time,—that you are in a position, that you have the heart, to feel anything like a brother's love towards them. And it is the very sharpness of the line that severs you from them that makes your brotherly love towards them burn bright and keen and warm. You love them as brethren now, in a sense and manner in which you never could love them before ; however closely you and they might be knit together, as issuing from the same womb, or dwelling in the same house, or associated in the same calling, or walking in the same way.

Yes ; though you have “known that man after the flesh ;” known him intimately, known him affectionately, known him so as to love him as a very brother when you sat together at the godless festive board, or drained together the cup of sinful pleasure ; yet now henceforth you “know him no more.” It is after another fashion than that of the flesh that you know him now ; and after another fashion that you love him ; with an intensity of brotherly longing for his good, unfelt, un-

imagined before. What sacrifice would you have made for him then? You would "lay down your life" to save his soul now. He was your playmate, your plaything then; you used him; you sported with him; you enjoyed him. And you had a kindly enough feeling towards him. He was profitable to you; or you found him always very pleasant to you. But he is far more to you now. He is precious, oh! how precious, in your eyes; precious, not as the congenial companion of a passing hour, but as one whom you would fain grasp as a brother for eternity.

2. No such brotherly love is possible for him who, not doing righteousness, is not of God. His frame of mind must be that of Cain; a frame of mind that but too unequivocally identifies him as one of the devil's children, and not God's. For there is no room for any intermediate position here. Either you are of God; or you are like Cain, who "was of that wicked one, and slew his brother." It was the contrast between his brother and himself that moved Cain to this act; and before he was moved to it, that contrast must have become very irksome and intolerable. It was not because he was void of natural affection, or because his disposition was one of wanton cruelty and bloodthirstiness; it was not in the heat of sudden passion, or in a quarrel about any earthly good, that Cain slew his brother; but "because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous."

It is this which chiefly marks the instigation of the devil; and his fatherhood of Cain, and such as Cain.

No doubt he has a hand in every sin or crime that his children commit. He fans the flame of lust, and fires the hot blood of furious passion. He sharpens the wits of wily craft, and helps the plotter in many a stratagem. He infuses fresh bitterness into the malign temper of envious hate, whoever or whatever its object may be. But he has a special grudge and spite against "the seed of the woman who is to bruise his serpent-head." More than anything else on earth ;—infinitely more than any remains or remnants of good that the fall has left in human nature and human society ;—for these he can turn to his own account and make his own use of ;—does that wicked one detest the faintest trace of the footsteps, the slightest breathing of the spirit, of him "whose goings forth have been from of old ;" who has been ever in the world, the wisdom and the word of God, the light and the life of men. Wherever his power appears, setting up God's righteousness and its claim to vindication against man's sin and its boast of impunity, there Satan's malice is stirred. And he makes his children fierce even to slaying ; as he made Cain.

He does so commonly by fretting and irritating the conscience, while at the same time he fortifies the stronghold of stout-heartedness and pride. For these two in combination—an uneasy conscience and an unbroken heart—are, in his hands, capable of being wrought mightily to his purpose. Let the truth and righteousness of God be brought so near to a man, by the divine word and Spirit, as to stir and trouble thoroughly his inward moral sense, while his desire and

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determination to stand his ground and not give in remains unabated, or rather is inflamed and aggravated ; —let the process go on ;—and let all attempts towards an accommodation, between the conscience's increasing soreness and the heart's increasing self-righteousness and self-will, be one after another frustrated and foiled ; —you have then the making of a Cain, a very child of the devil, who, if need be and opportunity serve, will not scruple to cut short the terrible debate and end the intolerable strife by slaying his brother Abel ; by “crucifying the Lord of glory!” O my fellow-sinner, let us beware! Let us not be “as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother.”

I may think that there is no risk of my being as Cain ; it will be long before I slay my brother Abel ! But let me give good heed to what John records as the natural history, as it were, of Cain's sin. He “slew his brother ; and wherefore slew he him ? because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.”

Let me ask myself a plain but pointed question. Is there no child of God, no godly man or woman of my acquaintance, the thought of whom, or the sight of whom,—or his or her talk in the field,—troubles me and makes me feel uncomfortable ? Many professing Christians I know and like. Many who pass for serious and evangelical I can meet and converse with, easily and satisfactorily enough. There were four hundred prophets of the Lord that Ahab had no sort of objection to have near him and to listen to. But there was one Micaiah that he did not care to send for. “I hate

him," said the king, "for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." Is there any Micaiah who is thus a sort of eyesore to me?—any Abel who provokes in me a kind of Cainish spirit?

It is not, strictly speaking, envy, or mere jealousy of another's superior excellence. It is the tacit rebuke administered to my shortcoming and sin;—the awakening of a lurking consciousness of something wrong in my state of heart or way of life,—the unsettling of my security,—the begetting in me of—I scarcely know what to call it—dissatisfaction, apprehension, an uneasy and unpleasant feeling of my not being altogether, in some particulars, what I ought to be, or might be;—it is that which disturbs me, in the presence of some child of God, or in the thought of such an one, as an unquestionable type of godliness.

Ah! it is a dangerous symptom; you brother, as well as I, may give good heed to it. It is the very germ of Cain's murderous mood. It may not lead you to slay your Abel; him or her who is thus obnoxious to you; whose eminent nearness to God causes you to be too sensible of your distance. You have other ways of getting rid of the troubler of your peace without raising the cry, Crucify him; away with him. You can evade his company, keep out of hearing of his voice, and elude the glance of his eye. You can shut him out of your mind, and bid him be to you as if he was not. Or you may try another plan. You may open your ears to whispers against him; you may sharpen your sight to discover faults and follies in him; you may "sit and

speak against your brother, slandering your own mother's son," if by any means you can make him out to be not so very immaculate or so very heavenly, after all, but that you may stand your ground and pass muster beside him in the end. What is all that but slaying your brother; slaying him virtually if not literally; slaying him very cruelly? And wherefore? "Because your own works are evil and your brother's righteous." Be not deceived. Be very sure that "in this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother."

I draw an important practical inference from the views now submitted. They may teach us something of the nature, and what may be called the *genesis*, or natural history, of brotherly love.

We are accustomed, when we speak of the particular affection of brotherly love, as distinguished from the general affection of love or charity, to rest the distinction chiefly on the opposite characters of those who are the objects of the two affections respectively. Charity or love—I speak of it in its earthward, not its heavenward direction—has for its objects men, all men, indiscriminately; men, as such. Brotherly love has for its objects the children of God; the members of the family or brotherhood of Christ's people; who have one Father, one Lord and elder Brother, one Spirit, one hope, one home. We love all men with a love of benevolence; we love the brethren with a love of congeniality and

delight. So far as it goes, this is of course a true account.

But does not John's statement here suggest a somewhat different, or at least an additional, explanation? May not the root of the distinction lie in the subject of the affection rather than in its objects; in the person loving, rather than in the persons loved? Is not the character of the affection determined by the character of him in whom it dwells, even more than by the character of him to whom it goes forth?

At all events, when my character is changed, the character of all my love,—let who may be its objects, and let it have ever so many objects, differing ever so widely,—is changed in a corresponding manner. There is not one of those I loved before whom I love now as I used to do. My love to every one of them is a quite new love. The wife of my bosom, the child of my house, the servant and stranger within my gates, the beggar at my door, the queen reigning over me, the companion of my leisure, the partner of my business, the holy man of God, the wretched prodigal, the child of misery and vice—there is not one of them whom I love now as I did before. It is a new affection that I feel to every one of them.

And what is it that is new about it? Is it not that it is all now brotherly love? Is it not that one and all of the varieties of natural affection,—not stifled, not lost or merged, but subsisting still, as distinct as ever and stronger than ever,—have infused into them this one common element of brotherhood in the Lord?

In me, in my heart, there is brotherly love to every one ; equal brotherly love to all.

It does not call forth the same response from all ; it has not the same free course with respect to all. In some, alas ! it is deeply wounded, meeting with what sorely tries and grieves it, as when the sad cry breaks forth, " Who hath believed our report ? "—" All day long have I stretched forth my hands to a perverse and gainsaying generation." In others, again, it finds a blessed, present recompense ; and the fellowship of saints on earth becomes the foretaste of heaven's joy. But is it not the same affection,—real, true, deep brotherly love,—that is so sorely vexed in the one instance, and so richly gratified in the other ? Was it not the same affection in the heart of Jesus that caused him to " rejoice in spirit," as he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, " I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes ; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight ; "—was it not, I ask, the very same affection that caused him to exclaim, as he drew near to the city, and wept over it, " O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings ; and ye would not ! "

XXV.

BROTHERLY LOVE THE FRUIT AND TEST OF PASS-
ING FROM DEATH UNTO LIFE—THE WORLD'S
HATRED—THE LOVE OF GOD.

“Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer : and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us : and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”—1 JOHN iii. 13-16.

THERE is an emphatic meaning in the address (ver. 13), “my brethren.” It prepares the way for the use of the first person “we” (ver. 14). You are of the company of the brethren, as I am. I address you as such, when I exhort you “not to marvel if the world hate you.”

For why should you not marvel at this? Why should you not count it strange or take it amiss?

For this, among other reasons : because we know,—you and I, as brethren, know,—that to love as brethren is a grace belonging entirely to the new life of which we are partakers. It is the very mark of our possessing that life. Why then should we marvel if the dead are incapable of it? It is the world's nature to hate the godly ; it was our nature once ; and if it is not so now, it is because we have undergone a great change ; “we

know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren." It must be so. The absence of this brotherly love is, and must be, a fatal sign of death, and of continued death ; "he that loveth not his brother abideth in death." For not to love a brother is to hate him ; and to hate him is to murder him ; and to murder him is to forfeit life :—"Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer : and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." Whereas, on the other hand, the presence of this brotherly love is a blessed sign of life ; for it marks our oneness with the Living One ; our insight into the manner of his love and our sympathy with it :—"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us : and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

Here then we have, in broad contrast, the way of the world, which is death, and the way of God, which is life. It is the way of the world to hate, and so to hate as to murder. It is the way of God to love, and so to love as to lay down life to save. And it is in virtue of this contrast that the test holds good :—"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."

The world's hatred,—God's love,—these are what are here contrasted. And yet there is one point at least of partial similarity. The affection, in either case, fastens in the first instance upon objects opposed to itself. The world hates the brethren ; God loves the world,—"the world lying in the wicked one." And in a sense too the ends sought are similar. The world,

which hates, would assimilate those it hates to itself, and so be soothed or sated ; God, who loves, would assimilate those he loves to himself, and so have satisfaction in them. This indeed may almost be said to be a universal characteristic of sentient and intelligent mind ; be it pure and benevolent or depraved and malevolent ; be its ruling passion hatred or love. It is, so far, common to the wicked one and the Holy One. The wicked one, in whom the world lies, hates ; and his hatred fastens on the brethren. In his hatred he will not scruple about murdering them outright in cruellest fashion. But he is as well, or even better pleased, if he succeeds in murdering them after a milder method ; by getting them to listen to his wily speech. The Holy One loves ; and his love fastens on the lost. It is a love in spite of which he must, at the last, acquiesce in the inevitable ruin of multitudes, whom alas ! its manifestation fails to touch. But his heart is set on winning them to his embrace, and having them to be of one mind and nature with himself. And his love has this advantage over the opposite affection. Who ever heard of the wicked one laying down his life to secure the accomplishment of his object ?—or any Cain who is of the wicked one ? “ But hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us : and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”

I. Of the world's hatred of the brethren two things are said : it is natural, and it is murderous.

In the first place, it is natural ; not “ marvellous,”

but quite natural. The Lord prepared his disciples beforehand to expect it, warning them not to look for any other treatment at the world's hands than he had met with. It should not, therefore, be matter of surprise to you if the world hate you. And yet it is sometimes apt to be so. Notwithstanding all warnings, and all the experience of others who have gone before him, the recent convert, the young Christian,—fresh, buoyant, enthusiastic,—may fancy that what he has to tell must pierce all consciences and melt all hearts. He goes among his fellows, eager to appear in his new character, to bear his new testimony, to sing his new song. Alas! he comes in contact with what is like a wet blanket thrown in his face : cold looks and rude gestures of impatience ; jeers and jibes ; if not harsher usage still. Instead of the welcome he anticipated, as he hastened forth, with face all radiant from the heavenly fellowship, and lips divinely touched with a live coal from off the altar, crying,—I have found him, come and see ;—he meets with chilling indifference, or contempt, or anger. He is tempted to give up as hopeless the task of dealing with the dead. But no. Count it not strange, brother, that you fall into this trial. Why should you ? Is their reception of you very different from what, but yesterday perhaps, yours would have been of one coming to you in the same character and on the same errand ? Surely you know that love to the brethren, brotherly love, true Christian, Christ-like love—willing to give a cup of cold water to a disciple in the name of a disciple, and welcome the least of the little ones for the Master's

sake—is no plant of natural growth in the soil of corrupt humanity; that, on the contrary, it is the fruit of the great change by means of which a poor sinner “passes from death unto life.” Have you not found it to be so in your own case? Would anything short of that have made you love the brethren, and hear them gladly, when speaking in a brotherly way to you? Would anything else have overcome your hatred of them? Then “marvel not,” nor be impatient, “if the world hate you.”

Again, secondly, the world's hatred of the brethren is murderous, as regards its objects:—“He that loveth not his brother abideth in death: whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer.”

“Loveth not,” “hateth,” “murdereth!” There is a sort of dark climax here! Not loving is intensified into hating, and hating into murdering. The three, however, are really one; as the Lord teaches in the sermon on the mount, to which undoubtedly John here points (Matt. v. 21-24). Not to love is to hate; and to hate is to murder. If, therefore, you would be safe from the risk of being a murderer, see that you are not a hater. And if you would not be in danger of being a hater, see that you are a lover.

It is a solemn lesson that is thus taught; and it would seem to be meant for you who are apt to marvel if the world hate you, as well as for the world that hates you. In that application, it may suggest some important practical thoughts.

1. When Abel first caught a glimpse of Cain's state of mind towards him, he might feel as one who painfully

dreamed. He must have been slow to take it in. They had grown up together in the same home ; worked and played together ; prayed together at the same mother's knee ; listened together to the same father's teaching ; done one another many offices of kindness ; enjoyed much pleasant intercourse in house and field. While that strange conversation about God and his worship goes on, Abel is startled as he sees Cain's dark frown betokening growing wrath. Hate gleams more and more from those kindling eyes. Is it fear that pales the meek martyr's face,—or is it anger that agitates his frame,—as that hoarse voice threatens and that cruel arm is raised ? Not so. It is horrible surprise at first ; and then deep concern, tender pity, bitter grief. That Cain has ceased to love him as a brother,—that is what chiefly wounds him ; wounds him more keenly than the stroke that fells him to the ground. Has he lost, can he not win back, a brother's love ? Is there such hatred, so murderous, in one who is still so dear to him ? Will he rather slay me than taste and see how good our God is who has provided for us both the same sin-offering of the lamb ? It is a bitter sorrow. But it is not the bitterness of a sense of his own wrong ; it is the bitterness of the melancholy insight he has got into his poor brother's dark and miserable heart.

Ah ! think ;—when you come in contact with some one to whom you would fain commend the Saviour and the sacrifice you have yourself found so precious,—an old familiar friend perhaps with whom your intercourse has been wont to be frequent and sweet,—a humble

neighbour who has often been glad to see you under his lowly roof, to accept your alms in his poverty or your kindly sympathy in his distress ; and when you begin to discover that, as a child of God, you are not so welcome now as you were when like himself you were a child of the world ; when he treats you coldly or rudely, and makes it plain that he would fain in any way get rid of you ;—think rather of his case than of your own. It may be hard for you to bear with his irritability and incivility ; and you may be provoked, if not to retaliate, yet to let him alone and make your escape. But consider him ; and have pity upon him. This malignant spirit of dislike to righteousness, and to him whose works are righteous, is far worse for him to cherish than for you to suffer. Leave him not. Rather stay by him and plead with him ; even though his hatred rise to murder.

2. For you need, for yourselves, and with special reference to the world's hatred of you, to be ever on your guard, lest somewhat of the old dark spirit should creep in again into your own hearts. And remember it may insinuate itself very insidiously and stealthily.

Consider once more the stages or steps : not loving ; hating ; murdering. Ah ! how easily may the first of these begin : not loving. It is a simple negation ; no taking of any positive step ; but only, as it were, not taking any step at all ; or not this or that particular step ; giving up ; letting alone ; using less energy of prayer and pains ; feeling less interest.

Who is it that you have ceased, or are ceasing, to love with a true brotherly love like Christ's ?

Is it one still unconverted and unsaved? You have been dealing with him, as you think, faithfully and affectionately; pleading with him for Christ, and with Christ for him. You have had much patience, and have persevered long. Nor has it been mere taskwork with you; it has been a work of love. You have felt a real concern for his soul—a real longing for his salvation. But somehow the case is not very hopeful; it was not very hopeful at first, and it is becoming less so,—or at least not more so. You are getting reconciled to the idea of failure and disappointment. You are not at first conscious of a diminished regard for your poor brother; but you are becoming less sanguine, and gradually less earnest. The work of love becomes more like taskwork now. You will do your duty; you will continue to be kind to him,—to warn and exhort him, to set Christ before him, and urge him to believe and live. But there is less cordiality in what you do and say; you bestow less of your heart upon him. This may be natural,—in a sense and measure perhaps unavoidable, and not altogether unreasonable. There may be a limit to your earnest striving, in love, with an obdurate sinner, as there is a limit to the striving, in love, of God's own Spirit with him. But beware. It is not because he ceases to love that the Spirit ceases to strive. See that it be not otherwise with you; that it be not your ceasing to love that makes you cease to strive. If it be Christ's mind that you should shake off the dust of your feet as a testimony of judgment against any one whom you have been plying with the testimony of mercy, he

will make that plain enough to you by unmistakable indications of his will. And you will see all the more clearly, and judge all the more fairly, if there be no ceasing to love ; no growing coldness and indifference ; no feeling of a sort of apathetic acquiescence in the inevitableness of that poor soul's fate. No such feeling is there in the tears of Jesus over Jerusalem. Beware, I repeat, of any such feeling insinuating itself into your bosom. Not to love, with a love that yearns to save, and weeps rivers of waters for the lost, is to hate ; and to hate is to murder. "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation."

Or is it one of Christ's little ones ; one of the fatherless and widows whom you visit in their affliction ; one whose feet you have counted it a privilege to wash ? The service has been a delight ;—that suffering saint's chamber has been to you a Bethel. You have got in it far more than you have given of spiritual refreshment and consolation. So you say and feel, under the impulse of your first love for that brother in Christ. But on further acquaintance you find, or think you find, things in him or about him that are fitted to damp and repel your ardent advances. He is not so perfect as you thought ; his person not so pleasant ; his room not so tidy. Infirmities come out ; disagreeable incidents occur ; rude friends interfere. It is not romance now, but reality. You are not quite so enthusiastic as you were in your esteem of him, or quite so frequent and regular in your calls upon him. A sort of weariness comes over you when you knock at his

door ; a sort of distasteful recoil arrests you as you enter his chamber. It is plain that your Christian admiration, your brotherly love towards him, is not exactly what it was ; not so glowing and so gushing. It may be as real and genuine ; it may be even more trustworthy, because it is more sober. If so, it is well. But beware. It may be otherwise. There may be an approximation to a state of mind not quite so right or safe ;—"not loving your brother," ceasing to love him as your brother in Christ, allowing natural or accidental causes of estrangement or indifference to cool your brotherly affection. And what then ? May there not come something worse ? A certain half-unconscious dislike ; a certain pleasure, even, in hearing him ridiculed or defamed ; a not unwilling participation in the idle talk that, exaggerating defects, and overlooking or misrepresenting excellences, would take away his fair name and reputation, and play the murderer as regards his Christian character and standing ?

Be on your guard against this spirit of the world finding harbour again in your breasts. I speak to you who have "passed from death unto life," and who know what it is to love the brethren ; to love all men with a true brotherly love in the Lord,—a love that looks on them as immortal beings,—having near them a Saviour dying for them, having in them a Spirit striving with them, having before them a Father waiting to be gracious. Even you need to be warned against the world's evil temper of dislike and envy. Consider how insidious it is. It begins with what may attract little

observation and awaken little alarm ; a change, scarcely noticeable, or if noticed easily explained by altered circumstances, sobering age, sad experience, repeated disappointment, or any of the thousand causes that make the heart beat less wildly as time rolls on. Consider also its deadly danger. The “not loving,” or not loving so purely and so truly, comes to be “hating,”—avowed or unavowed,—distaste, disinclination, displeasure, dislike ; estrangement, suspicion, envy. And to hate is to “murder ;” one way or other, by neglect or by calumny, by ill thoughts or ill words or ill deeds, it murders. Consider finally how natural it is ; so natural that only your “passing from death unto life” can rid you of it, and make you capable of its opposite. You need not marvel if the world thus hate ; for it is its nature. Nor need you marvel that you should still require to be exhorted not thus to hate ; for it is your nature too. Grace may overcome it ;—grace alone can do so. And even grace can do so only through continual watchfulness and prayer, continual recognition of the life to which you pass from death, and continual exercise of the love which is the characteristic of that life.

II. Of this love, as of the hatred, two things are said. In the first place, it is natural now to the spiritual mind ; natural as the fruit and sign of the new life ;—“ We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren.” It is natural to us, in our old state of death, to hate ; it is, or should be, natural to us, in our new state of life, to love. For our

life is our participation with Christ in his life ; and his life, like the Father's, is manifested in love ; or is love. Our life, therefore, is also love ; it is our loving as the Father loves, and as the Son loves. And this, secondly, implies that the love in question is the very opposite of the murderous hatred of the devil ; it is self-sacrificing, like the love of God himself :—" Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us : and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (ver. 16).

It is a high ideal of this love to men as brethren that is set before us. It is sympathy with God in his love to us ; and in that love as measured by his laying down his life for us. Whom does he thus love ? Us ; and all such as we are ; or as we were, when his love reached us. " Scarcely for a righteous man will one die : yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." " When we were without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." For us sinners, for us without strength, for us ungodly, he laid down his life. And it was a brotherly love to us that moved him to do so. It was as our brother that he sacrificed himself for us. It is that we may be his brethren that he would have us to perceive his love, in sacrificing himself for us,—and to believe it.

Oh ! to be enabled to enter more and more into this brotherly love of Jesus ; to apprehend its nature ; to imitate its spirit ! Truly it is the opposite of the

hatred of a brother which marks one abiding in death. That hatred prompts to take away another's life ; this love to lay down one's own. "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer ;" but here is one so loving his brother, that to save him alive he sacrifices himself. Cain was bent on slaying his brother ;—Abel was anxious, at the risk of death, to win Cain. We, in our hatred, because he was righteous and we were evil, slew a greater than Abel. He loved us with more than Abel's love when "he laid down his life for us."

We know that we have passed from death unto life, when we love our fellow-men with a brotherly love like his ; when we are so bent on saving and blessing them, that we are willing, not only to give our whole lives for their good, but to suffer all loss—even death itself—at their hands. Even when they are still our enemies, because the enemies of our Lord ; even while they hate us, and persecute us, and say all manner of evil against us ; how does it become us still to love them as brethren,—with a love that would seek them as brethren, and welcome them as brethren, and live and die for them as brethren ! Can they be more hostile or injurious to us, than we were to Christ when he loved us and laid down his life for us ? Have they wearied us as we have wearied him ? or provoked us as we have provoked him ? or pierced us as we have pierced him ? How shall we not continue to care for them and plead with them, as Christ continued to care for us and plead with us,—oh ! how long, how patiently, how tenderly,—if by any means he might

bring us to receive him as laying down his life for us ! And when, by his Spirit, they are moved and melted, and on the footing of that great propitiation reconciled to God and to us,—how shall we set bounds to the warmth and cordiality of our embrace of them as now our brethren indeed ! Can we grudge any service or sacrifice to show our love, even should it be the laying down of our lives for them, as he laid down his life for us ?

This is our security against the evil spirit of Cain coming in again to trouble us. It is to make full proof of the better spirit of Abel, or of him in whom Abel, like us, believed, even Jesus, who “so loved us, even when dead in sins, that he gave himself for us, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God ;” and who so loveth us, as his brethren, for whom he laid down his life, that he would have us to be sharers as his brethren with him in all the love with which the Father loveth him and all the glory which the Father giveth him.

XXVI.

RIGHTEOUSNESS OR TRUTH IN BROTHERLY LOVE—
ESSENTIAL TO THE ANSWER OF A GOOD CON-
SCIENCE IN OURSELVES AND BEFORE GOD.

“But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.”—1 JOHN iii. 17-21.

THE lesson here is sincerity. It is with special reference to the grace or affection of brotherly love, that this lesson is in the first instance enforced; and the manner in which the subject is introduced is noticeable.

The highest possible model or ideal has been presented for imitation:—“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” Then immediately, by way of contrast, the testing case put is made to turn on one of the simplest and commonest instances of the exercise of human pity:—“But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” It looks almost

like irony or sarcasm. Your love to the brethren,—to men as brethren,—should reach to your laying down your lives for them. Yes! And it would, if that were necessary, or might do them good. So you say, and think. But what if, having this world's good, and seeing your brother have need, you shut up your bowels of compassion from him? How then dwelleth the love of God in you? Is that loving as God loves?

Beware of self-deception in this matter. It is easy to imagine what you would do to win or help a brother; and you may please yourselves by carrying the imagination to any length you choose. If a great act of self-sacrifice would avail, you would not shrink from it. But what if you grudge some far readier and easier service;—a gift to the needy out of your abundance; or a visit of sympathy to the widow out of your leisure; or a word in season to the weary out of the fulness of your own happier experience; or a helping hand to snatch a perishing soul from the pit and set him on the rock on which the Lord has set you? You will lay down your life for one who is, or who may be a brother! And yet you cannot lay down for him your love of this world's good; your love of ease and selfish comfort; your fastidious taste, that shrinks from contact with squalid wretchedness and vulgar ways; your proud or shy reserve, that keeps the humble at a distance; your false shame, that sends you in upon yourself when you should be sowing beside all waters.

Thus somewhat sternly John's tender expostulation—for it is very tender—is introduced: "My little

children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue." There is enough in the world of that sort of love. "Let us love in deed and in truth." It is only thus that we can "know ourselves to be of the truth," or to be true, and so can "assure our hearts before God." We can have no such assurance if our consciousness hints that there is guile in our spirit. "For if our heart condemn us," how can we face him "who is greater than our heart and knoweth all things;" all things about our heart; its secret windings and subtle refuges of lies? It is only "if our heart condemn us not,"—condemn us not, that is, as unrighteous and insincere in the matter on hand,—it is only then that we can "have confidence toward God."

Thus John brings out into prominence a general principle connecting conscience and faith, with immediate reference to his particular topic of brotherly love.

The principle may be briefly stated. There can be no faith where there is not conscience; no more of faith than there is of conscience; no firm faith without a clear conscience. In plain terms, I cannot look my God in the face if I cannot look myself in the face. In a sense, I must be able to justify myself if I would look on God as justifying me; I must be able to acquit myself of guile if I would reckon on his acquitting me of guilt. If my heart condemns me, much more must he condemn me who is greater than my heart, and knoweth all things.

But must not my heart always condemn me? Must I not be always confessing that my heart condemns

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me, and that therefore the searcher of it must condemn me much more ?

No. This is not the language of legitimate confession, although it is often used as such. On the contrary, it is rather a protest against the very sort of confession which it is too commonly employed to express. It rebukes all conventionalism ; all formal routine or covert guile ; all false dealing with myself and with God. It demands, in worship and fellowship, that I approach him who is greater than my heart and who knoweth all things, as one whose heart does not condemn him.

Reserving the special application of this principle to the grace of brotherly kindness, I ask you for the present to consider it more generally with reference to the divine love—first, as you have to receive it by faith ; and, secondly, as you have to retain it and act it out in your loving walk with God and man.

I. I am a receiver of this love. And it concerns me much that my faith, by which I receive it, should be strong and steadfast ; which, however, it cannot be unless my conscience, in receiving it, is guileless. David experienced this ; and he describes his experience in the thirty-second Psalm. There was a time, he says, when he kept silence ; when there was guile in his spirit. Then he had no rest. He was unwilling to be thoroughly searched and tried by God ; to have the hurt of his soul otherwise than slightly healed ; to have the deadly sore probed to the bottom, that the oil and balm to be poured in might reach the root of the



disease. "His heart condemned him ;" and there was one "greater than his heart, knowing all things," whose "hand day and night was heavy upon him" (ver. 3, 4). He got enlargement and assurance only when he tried the more excellent way of full and frank confession, apprehending full and free forgiveness (ver. 5-7). Then "his heart did not condemn him, and he had confidence toward God ;" "being of the truth, he assured his heart before God."

It must be noticed, however, that the ground of this assurance or confidence is not the consciousness of integrity, thus declared to be indispensable, but that gracious dealing on the part of God for which it makes way. The negative form of John's language is not without its meaning here,—“if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.” It describes simply the removal of an obstacle ; a hindrance or obstruction taken out of the way. A haze or mist of earth is dispelled, that the sun from heaven may give light and warmth. A work of the devil is undone, that the work of God may be wrought. For this inward misgiving, this secret consciousness of insincerity, "our heart condemning us," is of that wicked one. It comes of his lie still heeded, and, as it were, half believed. We must let it go, that the truth may make us free.

The plain question then is, Are you dealing truly with God as he deals truly with you? Are you meeting him, as he meets you, in good faith? Is reserve on your part laid aside, as it is thoroughly laid aside on his part? He makes advances to you in his gospel,

advances most generous and free ; he gives you assurances most firm and faithful. These are the ground and warrant of your confidence before him ;—these alone, and not anything in yourselves, in your own consciousness of integrity, or in your conscience acquitting you of deceit. But they can be so only when they have their free course and their perfect work in you. And that they cannot have if “there is guile in your spirit,” if “your heart condemns you.”

May not this be the explanation of that want of assurance of which some anxious souls complain ? They are not at ease ; they have not comfort, peace, liberty : they feel as if they could not win Christ, so as to be sure of being in him. They see how complete he is for them, as well as how complete they would be if once in him ; and they would fain win him and be found in him. But they cannot. Why not ? What is there between him and them ? Guilt it cannot be ; for guilt of deepest dye he takes away ; but it may be “guile.” Sin it cannot be ; but it may be silence ; “keeping silence.” Let them not lay the blame of their unquiet and unsatisfied state of mind upon God, or Christ, or the Holy Spirit ; upon the gospel way of salvation, or upon the gospel call. All the persons of the Godhead are in favour of their “assuring their hearts before God.” In the Father, they have rich, free, sovereign grace ; altogether gratuitous ; unbought and unconditional. In the Son, they have an infinitely precious atonement, an infinitely meritorious work of righteousness, meeting all claims in law against them

and upon them. In the Spirit, they have an almighty agency, shutting them up into Christ, and taking of what is his to show to them. Then in the gospel, they have all this love of the one God,—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,—made over to them, if they will but have it, without price and without reserve,—just in order that they may “assure their hearts before God.” The whole plan of salvation contemplates that result, and makes full and adequate provision for its being realised.

If it is not, why is it not? Look well to this question, my brother. See if there is not in you some double-dealing, for which “your heart condemns you.” Is all straightforward? Is all real and downright earnest with you? Or are you toying and playing with spiritual frames as if it were all a mere affair of sentimentalism? Or are you brooding over your own gloomy thoughts with that sort of morbid self-satisfaction that feeds on doubt and despair?

Thus, first, is it a real thirsting for God, a genuine and strong desire for his face and favour, that is moving you; such as will break through obstructions and “take the kingdom by force?” Or is it the old Israelitish temper of peevish and petulant discontent, rather pleased than not to have to complain that you cannot find the living water? And, is all right as regards your perfect willingness to fall in with God’s plan? Is there no disingenuousness here; no dislike of being indebted wholly to free grace; no hesitancy about letting go your last hold of the prop on which you have been leaning, and casting yourself, as by a leap in the dark,

into the arms of the waiting Saviour? Above all, thirdly, is there a clear understanding as to the terms on which you would choose to be with God? Is there no shrinking from the footing on which Christ would place you with his Father and your Father, his God and your God? Is there a sort of half-consciousness in you that you would really apprehend and welcome the mediation of Christ better than you do, if it were meant merely to establish a relation between God and you, so far amicable as to secure your being let alone now and let off at last; and that, in consideration of certain specified and ascertainable acts of homage; without its being insisted on that God and you should become so completely one? If your heart misgive you and condemn you on such points as these, it is no wonder that you have not peace with him "who is greater than your heart, and knoweth all things."

But, beloved, now your hearts condemn you not! "You are of the truth;" you are true yourselves, and truth is your object; the truth; the truth of God. Then you can have no objection to take in the truth, full and entire, no matter what humiliating discoveries it gives you of your own character and state; or what demands it makes upon you for submission to the sovereignty and grace of God. You have no quarrel with the gospel method of salvation for anything in it that abases you and exalts the Lord alone,—if you are "of the truth." Nor can you now be cleaving to any righteousness of your own. You cut the last cord that binds you to the old natural way of making your peace

with God, and sink into the embrace of him who is himself your peace. And it is peace, immediate, full, free, unreserved, that you are eager to have. No truce or compromise will content you now. You cannot be too completely reconciled to God, or brought into friendship too intimate, or fellowship too close and confidential, with your Father in heaven.

Is it so? In all this your hearts condemn you not. Then why should you not "have confidence toward God?" Is it not precisely thus that he is willing, in truth and faithfulness, to deal with you? Then taste and see that God is good; suffer "the love of God to dwell in you," without obstruction on your part or any partial dealing any more.

II. Not only as receiving God's love does it concern me to see to it that my heart condemns me not; but as retaining it, and acting it out, in my walk and conduct. Otherwise, "how dwelleth the love of God in me?"

The apostle Paul speaks of "holding faith and a good conscience;" "holding the mystery of faith in a good conscience." "Herein," he says, "do I exercise myself, that I have always a conscience void of offence, toward God and toward men." This was, in a large measure, the secret, or at least one indispensable condition, of his confident boldness, as a worker and a witness for Christ. His heart did not misgive or condemn him, as to any part of his habitual demeanour and behaviour. If it had, he would have been instantly smitten with a sort of moral or spiritual paralysis. For the absence of conscious, or half-conscious, guile, is not more essential

to your standing right with God, as regards your acceptance and peace, than it is to your continuing to stand right with him in the whole work of faith and labour of love by which you have to glorify him.

What a source of imbecility and unhappiness, even for the Lord's own people, is there in this ; " their heart condemning them !" Peter's heart must have condemned him, more or less consciously, when he entered the high-priest's hall, and mingled with the servants. What had he to do there at all ; getting in as he did ; taking the place he did, and the character ? Could he fail to have some misgivings, as he stood beside the fire warming himself, like any ordinary onlooker, while false testimony, that he could have contradicted, was swearing away his master's life ? He " kept silence " and slunk away among the menials of the office. He must have felt that either he should not have been there at all, or if there, he should have been at his master's side. He could not " assure his heart before God," or " have confidence toward God." It is all the less surprising, in these circumstances, that he should have fallen when sharper trial came. He was not found " holding faith and a good conscience."

May we not thus account for the want of joy and power that too often characterises your practical Christianity ? Your experience is felt to be lacking in life ; your influence somehow does not tell. May it not be because " your heart condemns you ? " " Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that which he alloweth." Is that happiness yours ? Is there nothing in which you

allow yourself about which you have a doubt? Have you a latent suspicion that you are not quite acting up to the standard of attainment at which you ought to aim; that you are not following out your convictions to the full extent to which they might lead you; that you are tolerating what may be at least of questionable expediency? You may have your excuses; your reasons why you cannot be expected to be altogether so heavenly as one, or so self-denied as another, or so decided and outspoken as a third, or so emphatic a protester against the world's follies as a fourth. But do these reasons satisfy you? Do they keep your mind at ease? Or have you occasional qualms?

It is a great matter if the eye be single; if "your heart do not condemn you." The consciousness of integrity is, of itself, a well-spring of peace and power in the guileless soul. The clear look, the erect gait, the firm step, the ringing voice, of an upright man, are as impressive upon others as they are expressive of himself. But that is not all. The assurance or confidence of which John speaks, is not self-assurance or self-confidence. No. It is "assurance before God;" it is "confidence toward God."

Why does the apostle make "our heart condemning us" so fatal to our "assuring our heart before God?" It is because "God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." He assumes that it is with God we have to do; and that we feel this. Our own verdict upon ourselves is comparatively a small affair; we ask the verdict of God. "With me," says Paul, "it is a very

small matter that I should be judged of man's judgment ; yea I judge not mine own self." I am not consciously self-convicted ; "yet am I not thereby justified ; but he that judgeth me is the Lord."

If indeed my heart condemns me, there can be little room for question as to what I am. Even then, however, what is fatal to my peace and power, is not my heart condemning me ; but God's being greater than my heart, and knowing all things. My own heart is not likely to condemn me without God condemning me also, and still more. But does it follow that, if my heart acquit me, he must do the same ? The contrary, rather, might be inferred. My heart not condemning me might be no proof or presumption that God did not condemn me. He may not acquit me as easily as I acquit myself ; for he is greater than my heart, and knoweth all things. There is, therefore, not a little grace here ; in our being permitted to infer, from our own heart not condemning us, a like acquittal on the part of God.

And yet how should it not be so if we are his children ? Does not the Spirit witness with our spirit that we are so ? And that, not merely generally, with reference to the general question of our being God's children ; but specifically, with reference to our being—at each successive moment in our Christian experience, and each successive step in our Christian life—his children ; his children, not in right of a past act of adoption and work of regeneration, but in virtue of a present filial heart and filial frame of mind towards him. It is thus that "the Spirit witnesseth with our spirit."

Our spirit witnesses first ; faithfully ; for we are upon honour. How is it with you, brother, with reference to this present duty ; this present trial ? What are you thinking and feeling about it ? That it is hard, too hard ; that too much is asked of you, or laid upon you ; but that you must do, or bear, as best you may, simply because you cannot help it ? These are servile thoughts and feelings ; they breathe the spirit of bondage, not the spirit of adoption. Your heart condemns you ; your own spirit witnesses against you ; the Divine Spirit therefore cannot witness for you. You cannot lift an honest filial eye to your Father ; for “ he is greater than your heart, and knoweth all things.” But if now, by grace, you get the victory over these risings of the old slavish mind in you, and have again somewhat of the same mind that was in him who was ever saying, “ Abba, Father,” as to every business, every cup, every cross ;—ah ! then your heart condemns you not of servile guile, and the sullen, dogged sense of bondage is all gone. Your own spirit witnesses, not of past but of present sonship. It is “ Abba, Father,” with you and in you, here and now ; you are here and now crying, “ Abba, Father.” And another there is who is in you here and now crying, “ Abba, Father ;” the Spirit of adoption ; the Spirit of God’s own Son. So he witnesses with your spirit that you are the sons of God ; that you are so here and now, at this moment, in the doing of this painful business, in the drinking of this bitter cup, in the bearing of this heavy cross. And thus he gives you great enlargement and assurance,

44 RIGHTEOUSNESS ESSENTIAL TO BROTHERLY LOVE.

great boldness and confidence, as you walk abroad in the light of God's loving face shining upon you, to manifest his love everywhere and always among your fellow-men ;—his love as “dwelling in you.”

For I must advert again to the immediate occasion of this appeal of John on the subject of sincerity or truthfulness. It is brotherly love of which he is discoursing ; the duty of loving all men as brethren ; loving every man as a brother ; with a true and real brotherly love ; a love that has respect to his being, or becoming, a brother in the Lord. Judge yourselves here, that you may not be judged. What says your heart, your conscience, as to this matter ? Does it acquit you ? Does it absolve you from the blame of blood-guiltiness ? Paul could take the people among whom he had lived and laboured to record, the day he bade them farewell, that he was pure from the blood of them all ; for he had not shunned to declare unto them the whole counsel of God. May I venture to do so ? Woe is me ! Can you venture ? Have you done what you could ? Are you doing what you can ? Or have you misgivings ? Here, a stumbling-block is put in the way of an inquirer by some sad inconsistency, or some cold repulse ! There, a precious opportunity of showing a little kindness, or speaking a word in season, is lost irretrievably ? Ah ! are these hands of yours clean which you hold out to some dear friend, or some well-disposed neighbour, or some stranger at your gate ; clean from the sin of careless dealing with that man, as regards the welfare of his soul for eternity ?

Are you conscious of indifference or insensibility about his spiritual state being your prevailing temper, in your intercourse with this or that person in your house, or in your social circle? Are you conscious of estrangement, alienation, distance, dislike? Does your conscience tell you that you are not treating him kindly as regards his own good, or not treating him faithfully as regards the claims of God? Ah! then, you cannot face your own heart; and how then can you, with open eye and upward gaze, face your God! If there be even a lurking suspicion of duty possibly neglected, or of wrong possibly done, rest not till all is righted. "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."

And generally I would urge the vast importance of guilelessness and unreservedness, in the whole domain of your spiritual experience. Why is it that we see so many joyless, cheerless, one might almost say useless Christians? Why so many living and walking in such a way as to give the notion of godliness being all gloomy doubt, painful discipline, self-absorbing anxiety, listless musing? Awake! Arise! Shake off the chains that bind you. Go forth in open day, under the open sky, to meet your God and Father, with your heart open to him, as his heart is open to you. Stand fast in the liberty with which Christ makes you free. Be upright. Be honest, frank, and fearless. Be yourselves; out and out yourselves. Dare to avow yourselves what you are,

41. HONESTY IS ESSENTIAL TO THE HIGHEST LOVE

It is not a word, but a fact in all men. It is the truth
the whole truth and nothing but the truth, themselves
and everything all truth including all truth: every-
where and always. It is honest and right, honest in
the street in the market in the marketplace in the
parade. It is honesty honest in the heart and to
the world. It is honest in the heart and Father in
heaven. It is honest in the heart as he creates you.
He who is honest in himself with the universe: all his
love and his faith. Let your whole heart be his. Be
you yourselves his: with all honesty. Be altogether,
here and for ever, his.

XXVII.

RIGHTEOUSNESS ESSENTIAL TO OUR PLEASING GOD
AND TO HIS HEARING US.

“And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.”—1 JOHN iii. 22, 23.

THIS is one of the strongest assertions that we have in Scripture of the efficacy of good works, as bearing on our relation to God. It has no reference, however, to the question of our acceptance or justification ; it raises an ulterior question. It manifestly connects a certain privilege with a certain practice, in the case of true Christians, considered as already in a state of grace. And it connects them, so as to make the privilege dependent upon the practice.

The privilege is, that “whatsoever we ask, we receive of him.” This is partly an explanation of the previous statement (ver. 21), and partly an additional thought. The “confidence which we have toward God” is such as emboldens us to ask what we will. And we ask confidently, because we know that God will not refuse us anything that we ask.

But it is the fact itself here asserted, and not our

sense or apprehension of it, that chiefly claims attention. It is certainly a strong assertion, "Whatsoever we ask we receive of him." And it is altogether unqualified ; absolute and unrestricted. We are on such terms with God that he will deny us nothing ;—that is the plain unequivocal meaning of what John says. And it is not to be modified or explained away by any supposed exceptions or reservations. It must be taken in all its breadth as literally true, in connection with the practice on which it is dependent.

That practice is obedience, "we keep his commandments ;"—or the performance of good works, "we do those things which are pleasing in his sight." For there are not two separate acts or exercises here spoken of ; but only one. "Doing things pleasing in God's sight" is not something over and above "keeping his commandments," or something different from it. That cannot be. For it is not merely doing things,—any things,—that may be pleasing in his sight,—but doing "those things ;" which must mean doing the things which he has commanded, and none other.

Is then this second clause a mere redundancy ? Nay, it adds much to the meaning. For one thing, it implies that when "we keep his commandments," or do the things commanded, we do them as "things pleasing in his sight ;"—we take that view of them in the doing of them. And further, it implies that God is really pleased with them. They are done in obedience to his commandments, and so done as to be in very truth "pleasing in his sight." They do please him ; and it is because

they do please him, that he is so pleased with us who do them that he can refuse us nothing that we choose to ask. He derives real gratification from what we do for him. What then will he not do for us?

To make this view of the matter clear, let us take our Lord himself as our example, in respect of both of these sayings of his beloved disciple.

I. "We keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." So John writes; and so also Jesus speaks; "He that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him" (John viii. 29). That was the hold which he had on the Father. It is, in a measure, the same hold that John says we have on the Father. "I do always those things that please him." "We do those things that are pleasing in his sight." The language is the very same;—the sense and spirit in which it is used must be the very same also. Let us consider it as used by Jesus; let us try to enter into his mind and heart in using it.

There is indeed in it, as used by him, a depth of meaning which we dare not hope, or even try, to fathom. It touches what must ever be an inscrutable mystery; the ineffable mutual complacency of the great Three in One, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and especially the Father's ineffable complacency in the Son of his love, as fulfilling on earth and in time the counsel of the God-head which dates from everlasting in heaven. But Jesus uttered the words for our sakes; and as expressing a human feeling which we may understand, and with

which he would have us to sympathise. That human feeling in the bosom of Jesus must have been very simple, and intensely filial ; realising intensely his filial relation to the Father, and his filial oneness with the Father. There is, if I may venture so to speak, a child-like simplicity, a sort of artless straightforwardness, in his saying so confidingly, so lovingly, so naturally, " I do always those things that please him." It is almost as if the words came out, half-unconsciously, from his lips ; as if he were thinking aloud. And certainly it is not of himself and his merit that he is thinking ; but of the Father and the Father's love. I always please him ; what I do always pleases him ; is the quiet comfort he takes in a trying moment. For it is indeed a trying moment. He has the cross in view. Men, displeased with him, are to " lift him up," and leave him to die in his agony alone. Not so the Father. He leaves me not alone ; he is with me ; " for I do always those things that please him."

Somewhat similar are the circumstances in which John would have us to say ; " we do those things that are pleasing in his sight." We are not to marvel if the world hate us ; the source of its hatred we know (ver. 13). And we know also the source of that better spirit of brotherly love with which it is to be met (ver. 14-16). Only let there be, on our part, open, guileless, unreserved sincerity (ver. 17-21). Let our heart, as in the sight of God, acquit us of all secret dishonesty. Let there be truth in the inner man ; the truth in love. Then we have the confidence of little children toward God. And,

as little children, we join with John, and with Jesus, in saying,—Whatever the world may do to us, we are not alone ; the Father is with us, and heareth us, for “we do those things that are pleasing in his sight.”

There is nothing then here of a legal spirit ; nothing of the Pharisee’s self-righteous gratitude : “ God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are.” It is not thus that John asks us to join with him in saying “we do those things that are pleasing in God’s sight.” Rather, he makes our saying this the very test of our entire freedom from all guile in our spirits ; all that sort of guile which such prayer as the Pharisee’s implies. For the Pharisee’s prayer represents him as keeping God’s commandments, in so far as he does keep them, merely to gain a selfish end and serve a selfish purpose. If he cares about doing what pleases God at all, it is merely with that view. He may be in earnest, ever so much. It is the earnestness of one seeking to make terms with an adversary, and win his favour or forbearance, by a measure of forced submission. It is the earnestness of one striving to effect a truce or compromise, on conditions ever so severe, for a boon ever so far off, and apt to be lost after all. Take the man who is serving God most anxiously, and with most painstaking observance of the letter of the commandments, on that footing ;—on the footing of his having thus to win his way to such kind and measure of God’s countenance as he thinks he needs, or cares to have. Ask that man, as before God, and in the eye of his own conscience, Is all clear and open, free and forthflowing, between you and him whom

you so painfully serve? Is there not, on the contrary, reserve and restraint; a holding back, as it were, of confidence on both sides; something still outstanding between him and you which makes you feel that all is hollow and unsatisfying?

Oh! to be converted, and become as little children! First, to be made willing, as little children, that all this misunderstanding should be ended, and this breach thoroughly healed, at once, and once for all, as the Father would have it to be, in the Son. And then, as little children, to know something of a little child's touching and artless simplicity, as we look with loving eye into the loving eye of the Father, and lovingly lisp out the touching words: "We keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight."

Therefore now, O humble and simple child of God, if, in saying this, you feel yourself to be identified with the holy child Jesus; if your saying it is really his saying it in you by his Spirit; if it is as one with him that you say it, or in all honesty would fain say it; do not hesitate, or have any scruple, from any apprehension of its being presumptuous, or any misgiving lest it should savour of self-righteousness. There can be no risk of that, if you say it in and with Christ. There was no self-righteousness in him; there could not be. For he began his work, himself already personally accepted as righteous; and it was as a Son that he learned obedience. He makes you one with himself in his acceptance and in his sonship. He asks you to let him make you thus one with himself; on the ground of his making himself

one with you in your sin and death. You are as he is when you join with him in his saying, "I do always those things that please him." There is no self-righteousness here; scarcely even self-consciousness. It is all direct, outward, upward motion of the soul; the outgoing of filial trust and love and loyalty; the fond and guileless unreserve, one would say, of an unreflecting child, who would be amazed if any doubt were cast on his father's being always with him, and always hearing him; for his heart bears him out in saying, with a child's simple and artless love,—I keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

Only make sure that with reference to this matter there is no guile in your spirit; that your heart does not condemn you. And there is one plain and practical test or safeguard. Your doing those things that are pleasing in God's sight, is simply your keeping his commandments. If your heart is not right with God, you will be seeking to recommend yourself to him, by services or sacrifices that you think may give you some extra-claim upon him, and almost lay him under obligation to you, as if you could benefit or profit him. You will be going about to establish or make good certain meritorious and tangible grounds of confidence, that may avail you when you have to plead with him in the judgment. But does not all that imply deceitful and double dealing both with him and with yourselves? If you would really please him, he has told you how to do so. You are not to cast about for ways and means of winning his favour; his favour is freely yours, in his Son. And what now will he have

at your hands? How, on the footing on which he would have you to be with him, are you to please him? How, but just as his own Son pleased him? It was his meat to do the will of him that sent him, and to finish his work. He kept the Father's commandments, and so abode in the Father's love.

II. "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him." In this saying also we have the countenance of Jesus; for we find him using it: "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always" (John xi. 41, 42). It was beside the grave of Lazarus. What it was that he had been asking, is not said. So far as appears, the prayer for the answer to which he gives thanks consisted not of articulate words but of tears and groans. At all events he was heard; what he asked, whatever it was, he received of the Father. And while openly acknowledging this, for the sake of the bystanders, he is careful to explain that it is no exceptional case. "Thou hearest me always;" "whatsoever I ask, I receive of thee always;" thou never refusest me anything. Why Jesus was so anxious, in this instance publicly to connect the miracle he was intending to do with the Father's hearing his secret prayer, it is perhaps useless to conjecture. It was a signal display of his power to overcome the corruption of the grave that he was about to give; that power which he is to put forth on a wider scale when he comes again. It was fitting, one might say, that in giving it he should, with more than ordinary explicitness and solemnity, carry the Father along with him. But his

studied generalisation of his thanksgiving is remarkable. "I knew that thou hearest me always." Never doth the Father leave me alone ; for I do always those things that please him ; and he heareth me always ; I have his ear always ; and whatsoever I ask I receive of him.

The Lord's manner of asking varies much. He weeps. He groans in the Spirit. He offers up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears. He asks, sometimes, as it might seem, almost incoherently (John xii. 27). Once, at least, he asks conditionally, "Father, if it be possible." But, be his manner of asking what it may, always the Father heareth him ; always, whatsoever he asks, he receives of him.

"Thou hearest me always!" It is a blessed assurance. And the blessedness of it really lies, not so much in the good he gets from the Father's hearing him, as in the Father's hearing him itself ; not so much in what he receives, as in his receiving it from the Father. For this is the charm, the joy, the consolation, of that access to the Father and that influence with the Father which you now have in common with the Son. It is not that you may enrich and gratify yourselves with what you win by asking from him. But it is literally that whatever you ask you receive of him, as his gift ; the proof that he is ever with you and heareth you always. Do you not lay the stress on the "him?" Whatsoever you ask you receive of "him." You might have to do with one as to whom your only consideration would be, how much you could get out of him or extract from him. There is a common proverb about quartering upon an enemy.

And there is no little satisfaction in the idea that you have a powerful and wealthy patron at your command, on whose resources you may draw at pleasure. But it is not thus that you stand with God. In these other instances, the chief, if not the whole value of any influence you have, is merely the amount of actual benefit obtained. The asker cares little or nothing for the motive which leads the giver to give, or for the disposition towards himself that the gift implies and indicates. It is all the same to him, whether it be extorted by menace; or wrung reluctantly by importunity; or made matter of cold and cautious stipulation. So as only he gets, any how, and on any terms, a certain amount or quantity of what he wants, he is content. That is not the mind of Christ, when he says, "The Father is with me;" "thou hearest me always." The support which this thought gives to him is not that it warrants him in demanding any personal benefit he may choose to specify, that would be pleasing to flesh and blood. No. It is its imparting to his inmost consciousness the sense of his being such a Son to the Father,—so dear in the Father's sight,—that the Father can refuse him nothing. He may ask what he will; and he is sure to receive it of the Father.

Ah! how then shall I ask anything at all? If such is my position, in and with Christ, how shall I have the heart or the hardihood to ask anything at all of the Father, except only that he may deal with me according to his good pleasure? If I am really on such a footing with the Father that "he heareth me always," and

“ whatsoever I ask I receive of him ;”—if I have such influence with him ;—if, as his dear child, pleasing him, and doing what pleases him, I can so prevail with him that he can refuse me nothing ;—what can I say? What can I do? I can but cast myself into his arms and cry, Thou knowest better than I, O my Father! Father, thy will be done!

Yes. And under that blessed committal of all to him, what freedom may I not use? When told that I and my doings are so pleasing to him that I may ask what I will and it shall be done; the very abundance of the grace silences me. It is enough for me, Father, that such is my acceptance in thy sight. But can I wield the sceptre? Can I use so tremendous a power as this, that whatever I ask thee to do thou doest? Nay. I am thy servant. Undertake thou for me. Enough for me to be assured that I so find grace and favour in thy sight that I have but to ask thee to do anything and it is done. Enough! Nay, more than enough! I can ask nothing on these terms, I must leave all to thee. But leaving all to thee, I pour out all the more freely my whole soul to thee, I spread out my whole case to thee. I speak to thee of all that is upon my mind and heart. I tell thee all my desire. My groaning is not hid from thee.

Let us look in closing at the two specimen commandments, if one may so call them, or the two parts of the one specimen commandment, which John expressly mentions in this connection.

1. “That we should believe on the name of his Son

Jesus Christ." The keeping of this commandment is the doing of what is pleasing in the Father's sight. It is so in proportion to the love with which he loveth the Son, and loveth us in the Son. We can do nothing that will please the Father more. It is what his heart is set on ; that the Son of his love should be the object of our faith.

Is there not here a word in season for you, O sinner, whoever you are, however guilty and however helpless, poor and needy, lost and undone? You, as it might seem, are in no condition to keep God's commandments so as please him ; and you cannot venture to ask anything, or to hope that you will receive anything, at his hands. Nay ; but here is something that you may do, and that will be very pleasing to him. "Believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ." It is true that he will not be pleased with your keeping any other commandment ; but he will be pleased with your keeping that one. You may not be in circumstances to do anything else that will be pleasing in his sight ; but you are in the very circumstances to do that which will please him best. He asks you if you will not do him this pleasure, "to believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ." Be it that you cannot receive anything you ask otherwise than on the footing of your keeping his commandments and doing those things that are pleasing in his sight. Here is the commandment for you, here and now, to keep ; here is the thing pleasing in his sight for you, here and now, to do. Without faith it is impossible to please God ; but faith pleases him ; it pleases him well. Then believe now.

And take a right view of the duty of believing. It is not using a great liberty to believe on the name of Jesus; it is simply "keeping the commandment of God." The liberty is all the other way. You use a great liberty when you refuse to believe. Be not disobedient; displease not God by unbelief; rather please him by believing. And believing, ask what you will, and it shall be given you.

Keep on believing. Continue to believe more and more, simply because you see and feel it more and more to be "his commandment that you should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ." Unbelief, in you who have believed, is aggravated disobedience. And, as such, it is and must be especially displeasing to God. It is his pleasure that his Son should be known, trusted, worshipped, loved; honoured as he himself would be honoured. You cannot displease the Father more than by dishonouring the Son; refusing to receive him, and rest upon him, and embrace him, and hold him fast, and place full reliance upon him as redeemer, brother, friend. Do not deceive yourselves by imagining that there may be something rather gracious in your doubts and fears; your unsettled and unassured frame of mind; as if it betokened humility, and a low esteem of yourselves. Beware lest God see in it only a low esteem of his Son Jesus Christ. Beware of guile. May not your staggering, hesitating faith be but half-faith after all? May it not be that you are unwilling to be wholly Christ's, and to have Christ wholly yours? Can that be pleasing to God? "What shall we do that we might work the

works of God?" asked the Jews, and the Lord replied : " This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he has sent." Therefore let us believe ; and let us be " strong in faith, giving glory to God."

2. " And love one another as he gave us commandment." The keeping of this commandment of love, as well as the keeping of the former commandment of faith, is the doing of that which is very pleasing in God's sight ; and, therefore, in the keeping of it we may with much confidence reckon and rely on the assurance that " whatsoever we ask we shall receive of him ;" that " he will hear us always."

I do not know—who can tell me?—what connection there was between the silent prayer of Jesus at the grave of Lazarus, and the utterance of that voice of power, " Lazarus, come forth !" Evidently the Lord wished it to be seen and known that in some very special manner the Father was with him, and went along with him, in that great work. " Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I know that thou hearest me always ; but because of the people that stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me." He would have it understood that he did the work as one whom the Father had on this occasion heard ; as one whom " the Father heareth always," and whom " the Father hath sent." For he was to do it, not as a thing that might please himself, but as a thing that would please the Father. He " loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus," and he was about to manifest and gratify his love by a very signal proof and token. But he would have all

men to observe that it was not merely on the impulse of a spontaneous burst of affection that he acted, but as doing what the Father commanded, and what would be pleasing in the Father's sight. Loving, in that way, Martha and her sister and Lazarus, he knew that in the practical outgoing of his love towards them ; in whatever loving words he was to say, and whatever loving works he was to do ; he might be sure of the Father being with him. For "he pleased the Father ;" he sought to please the Father, and did please the Father. Therefore he was sure of receiving what he asked ; sure of the Father hearing him then and hearing him always.

Go ye and do likewise. Love one another ; love your brother ; love as a brother every one with whom you have anything to do ; love him with the love that would fain have him for a brother. And let your love still always be "the keeping of God's commandment," and "the doing of what is pleasing in his sight." Let it not be, as it were, at your own hand that you love, but in obedience to the commandment of God. This may, in one view, be felt by you to be a sort of damper ; a drawback upon the warm spontaneous flow of your affections. It may seem to detract from the generous enthusiasm of your good will and your good offices. It takes away the chivalry and romance of this virtue. It makes Christian philanthropy a very humble and homely duty. You are to go among your fellows,—not loving them of your own accord, and at your own discretion showing your love,—but loving them in obedience to "the commandment of God ;" and in all the expressions and acts

of your love, simply bent on doing what is "pleasing in his sight." But after all, if this is a lowlier, it is a far more becoming and safer position for you to occupy. And it is one in which, if you honestly occupy it, you may with all the greater confidence rely on his hearing you now, and always. You do good and communicate; you are fruitful in every good work; you wash the feet of saints; you visit the fatherless and widows; you speak a word in season to the weary; you stretch out a helping hand to all that need; not merely as indulging your own loving impulses, but rather as carrying out God's loving purposes. You do these things because they are "well pleasing in his sight." Doing them thus, in singleness of eye, what encouragement have you to expect that he will be with you in the doing of them; that he will hear your prayer for those to whom you do them; and that whatsoever you ask on their behalf you will receive of him!

But in all this, let us see to it that we are "of the truth;" simple, guileless, upright; as regards our whole life and walk of faith and love. Only then can we have confidence before God that whatsoever we ask we shall receive of him. Let us lay to heart the Psalmist's acknowledgment,—“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me;” and his thanksgiving,—“but verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me.” Let us lay this to heart, not in any spirit of self-righteousness or vain-glory; but in simple sincerity, as little

children, honouring our Father; according to the quaint thought of an old writer :—"I find David making a complete syllogism, perfect in mood and figure. The first premiss being, 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me;' and the second, 'But verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer;'—I look for his drawing the conclusion: Therefore I regard not iniquity in my heart. But no. When I expect him to put the crown on his own head, he places it on God's;—'Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me.' I like David's logic better than Aristotle's; that whatever be the premiss God's glory is the conclusion."*

* Fuller's *Good Thoughts in Bad Times*.

XXVIII

OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS ATTESTED BY OBEDIENCE, AS
IMPLYING OUR ABIDING IN GOD, AND HIS ABID-
ING IN US BY THE SPIRIT GIVEN BY HIM TO
US.

“And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth [abideth] in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us. Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”—1 JOHN iii. 24; iv. 1.

THIS is another fruit of the keeping of God's commandments; or another view of the blessedness of doing so. It ensures our abiding in God, and his abiding in us; and that in a manner that may be ascertained and verified. Two practical questions are thus virtually put and answered. I. How may we abide in God?—so abide in him as to have him abiding in us? By keeping his commandments. How may we know that he abides in us? By the Spirit which he giveth us,—and giveth us in a way that admits of the gift being verified by trial.

I. In the keeping of God's commandments there is this great reward, that he that doeth so “dwelleth in God, and God in him.” Negatively, it has been already shown that there can be no such mutual indwelling if there is on our part disobedience to God's commandments. Sin, as “the transgression of the law,” is in-

compatible with such high and holy communion (iii. 6). It is the positive form of the statement that is now before us. Obedience, or the keeping of God's commandments, actively promotes this communion. It is more than the condition of it; it is of its very essence. If this mutual indwelling is not to be mere absorption,—which some dreamers in John's day held it to be;—if it is not to be the swallowing up of our conscious individual personality in the infinite mind or intelligence of God;—if it is to conserve the distinct relationship of God to man, the Creator to the creature, the Ruler to the subject, the Father to the child;—it must be realised and must develop itself, or act itself out, through the means of authority or law on the one side, and obedience or the keeping of the commandments on the other. It is, in fact, the very consummation and crown of man's old, original relation to God; as that relation is not only restored, but perfected and gloriously fulfilled, in the new economy of grace.

For consider the divine ideal, if I may so speak, involved in the creation of man after the image of God, and in the footing on which it pleased God to place man towards himself. Evidently God contemplated obedience, or the keeping of his commandments, as the normal state or character of man. While that state or character continued, there was the best understanding between the parties; between God and man; they were on the best of terms with one another. There was entire complacency on both sides; each resting and dwelling in the other with full and unalloyed satisfaction. You would

not say, in these circumstances, that this mutual indwelling of man in God and God in man was, in any proper sense, procured or obtained by man's obedience, by his keeping the commandments of God. You would rather say that it had in that way its proper outgoing or forthgoing, its conscious realisation. It is man's method of intercourse with God; the only competent, the only conceivable method, if God and man respectively are to keep their relative positions as distinct intelligences. It is only along the line of God ruling and man obeying, that the two, as separate persons or individuals, can so walk together as to get into one another's minds and hearts, and thus abide in one another. Such mutual indwelling of God in man and of man in God, becoming day by day more close, confidential, loving; through man's increasing insight into the exceeding excellency of the commandments he is keeping,—or rather of him whose nature and will they discover,—and through God's increasing delight in the growing intelligence and sympathy with which man keeps them; might seem to be complete; having in it all the elements of perfection, as regards both the holiness and the happiness of man. Can God and man be more to one another?

Alas! the drawback of a conditional standing, and a possible fall, is fatal. It leaves an opening for suspicion creeping in, upon the hint of a seeming friend, who would insinuate that restraint is irksome and independence sweet. Then all mutual indwelling is over. God and man must dwell apart. There may indeed be some sort of formal dealing between them; at least man

fondly imagines that there may. He thinks that he can so far keep God's commandments as thereby to right himself with God; to the extent at least to which he cares to be righted. He will make certain terms with God, or conceive of God as making certain terms with him; and he will be punctilious in the fulfilment of these terms. But that is not really keeping God's commandments. It is the keeping of a paction, if you will; the doing of his part in a bargain. And if the two parties concerned were equals, or if the relation between them were one of mutual independence, this might lay a foundation for some sort of mutual indwelling, by faith and love, in one another. Even in that case, however, the foundation is too narrow and precarious. If the mutual indwelling is to be real and thorough, there must be something more than the fulfilment of certain stipulated conditions between the parties. They must submit themselves, each to the other, cordially and without reserve; they must study to obey and please one another. Between God and man especially, the introduction of the conditional element, of anything that savours of the striking of a bargain or the making of terms, is and must be destructive of all real fellowship or intercommunion. No obedience rendered on that footing or in that spirit can ever secure your dwelling in God and his dwelling in you. In point of fact, it is apt,—if not from the first to occasion a breach,—yet ever afterwards, when a breach occurs, to widen, deepen, and perpetuate it, however it may be meant and may seem to bridge it over.

The practical value of a free gospel is, that it places your "keeping of God's commandments" on a different footing, and breathes into it a different spirit. You look to Jesus, and are one with him. You are in the same position of advantage for keeping God's commandments in which he was. You start, as he did, on the walk and work of obedience, not as seeking acceptance, but as already accepted ; not as a servant on trial, but as "a son abiding in the house evermore." You are not only what unfallen Adam was when the task of keeping God's commandments was set before him ; you are as Christ was when the same task was set before him.

Consider, then, what sort of keeping of God's commandments his was ; and how it must have conduced to his abiding in the Father, and the Father's abiding in him. Of course that mutual indwelling never could, through all his keeping of the Father's commandments, become more full and complete, in principle and essence, than it was before he began to keep them. But we may well imagine that to his human consciousness, and in his human experience, the sense of it must have been growing more intense, and more intensely soothing and beatific, as his keeping of them went on, and on, to its terrible and triumphant close. Among the things about obedience which he learned by suffering, surely this was one, that it has a mighty power to promote, enhance, and intensify the indwelling of man in God, and of God in man. He learned the grief and pain which such obedience as he had undertaken to render involved. Did he not learn something of its joy

and pleasure too—the joy and pleasure of apprehending and feeling, more and more, in his human soul, his dwelling in the Father and the Father's dwelling in him throughout it all?

I dare not venture upon particular illustration here. But I ask you, in any hour of deep and private meditation, and after you have prayed, or while you are praying, for the help of the Spirit, to put yourself alongside of Christ, in the sorest and hardest of the experiences which his keeping the Father's commandments entailed upon him. Try to enter into what his soul was feeling when it was "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." There was anguish, agony; the anguish and agony of having guilt to answer for, and a penal death to die. But was he not then and there, in his keeping of the Father's most dread and awful commandments, and through his keeping of them, dwelling in the Father and the Father in him, in a sense and with a depth and force of meaning, of which that human soul of his could not otherwise have had any experience? What insight, what sympathy, what rest, repose, and peace,—the rest, repose, and peace of unutterable complacency, on his part, in the Father, and on the Father's part in him, must there have been in his utterance of these simple words, "It is finished;" "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit!"

Let our keeping of God's commandments be like his. Let us seek grace that it may be so. In our case, as in his, this may imply a bitter cup to be drunk; a heavy cross to be borne. Like him, we have to learn

obedience by suffering. Let the obedience we thus learn be of the same sort as his. Let it be the giving up of our own will, always, everywhere, that God's will may be done. We shall then prove how good and acceptable and perfect that will of God is. We dwell thus in God when our will is merged in his will ; we have rest and repose in him ; our will in his will ; our thoughts in his thoughts ; our ways in his ways. And he dwells in us ; his will in our will ; his thoughts in our thoughts ; his ways in our ways. We enter into his mind and heart ; and he enters into ours.

II. The manner of God's abiding in us, or at least the way in which we may know that he abides in us, is specified :—"Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us." We are to distinguish here between our dwelling in God and his dwelling in us. Both are to be known as facts of our own consciousness ; not as revealed truths merely, but as realised experiences. The one, however, our dwelling in God, is to be thus known by our "keeping his commandments ;" the other, God's dwelling in us, by "the spirit which he giveth us." The one we know by what we do to God ;—the other, by what God does in us. And yet, the two means of knowledge are not far apart. They are not only strictly consistent with one another ; they really come together in one point.

For the Spirit is here said to be given to us ;—not in order to our knowing that God abideth in us, in the sense of his opening our spiritual eye and quickening our spiritual apprehension ;—but rather, as the medium

of our knowing it,—the evidence or proof by which we know it. He giveth us the Spirit; and by that token, his giving us the Spirit, we are taught by the Spirit to know that God dwelleth in us. The question therefore as to what this gift of the Spirit may be, is thus narrowed to a precise point.

Is it the gift of the Spirit enabling men to perform supernatural works that is meant? That can scarcely be; the gift of the Spirit for such works was never a sure sign of God's really and savingly dwelling in those who did them. Surely it must be the gift of the Spirit for the ordinary purposes of the Christian life and walk that John has in view; the gift of the Spirit common to all believers in all ages. God giveth us the Spirit in order that, by the Spirit being given, we may know that he dwelleth in us. He means us, therefore, to recognise this gift as a sure evidence of that fact. And how are we to recognise the Spirit as given to us? How otherwise than by recognising the fruit of the gift? The Spirit given to us is, as to his movement or operation, unseen and unfelt. But the fruit of the Spirit is palpable and patent. "It is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." For "against such there is no law" (Gal. v. 22, 23).

"Against such there is no law." That is an important addition or explanation here. There is nothing in the gift of the Spirit, or in the fruit of the Spirit as given, that is contrary to law; nothing, therefore, that can again bring us under the risks and liabilities of law. On the contrary, the Spirit being given, with such fruit,

is precisely what secures that kind of "keeping of the commandments" on our part, by which we "dwell in him." For, I must repeat, it is as the Spirit of adoption that he is given; "God sendeth forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father."

Thus the two elements and conditions,—the two means and evidences,—of this mutual indwelling of us in God and of God in us meet together. We dwell in God by keeping his commandments; he dwells in us by giving us his Spirit. But our keeping his commandments and his giving us his Spirit are really one; one and the same fact viewed on opposite sides. It is not any sort of keeping his commandments on our part that will ensure or attest our dwelling in him. It is not any way of giving us his Spirit on his part that will ensure or attest his dwelling in us. Our keeping his commandments in the spirit of bondage; in a legal, self-righteous, formal, and servile frame of mind; is not our dwelling in God. God's enabling us, by the power of his Spirit, to work miracles, would not be his dwelling in us. Our dwelling in him is our keeping his commandments, as his Son did, on the same filial footing and with the same filial heart. His dwelling in us is his "sending forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father."

III. From all this it follows that the counsel or warning, "Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God" (iv. 1), is as needful for us as it was for those to whom John wrote. We may think that it is the Spirit of God whom we are receiving into

our hearts and cherishing there, when it may really be another spirit altogether : one of the many spirits inspiring the “many false prophets that are gone out into the world.” Therefore we must “try the spirits.”

Do you ask how, or by what test?—“Hereby know ye the Spirit of God : Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God : and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God.”

The full meaning of this pregnant and searching test will be afterwards considered. Meanwhile, as bearing on the subject now in hand, it admits of at least one obvious application.

The Spirit that is of God will ever honour Christ ; and especially Christ come in the flesh ; which means not only Christ incarnate, but also and emphatically Christ crucified. The person and work of Christ, as the outward object of our faith,—the ground of our confidence before God outside of us and apart from us,—the true Spirit of God will ever magnify and glorify. He will not consent to substitute for that any inward experience, however heavenly, as superseding it or setting it aside. That is what false prophets, moved by an anti-christian spirit, are apt to do. It was a very marked characteristic of their teaching in John’s own day. An inward light,—an inward sense,—something, or much, of a Christ in them ; an inward revelation, or rapture, or elevation,—a sort of mystical indwelling of God or of Christ in them,—they extolled and cried up ; making it the sum and substance of all Christianity,—the whole

gospel of the grace of God. Now any spirit that fosters such a tendency is not of God. Any spirit that would encourage us to look in upon ourselves and not out to Christ for peace or holiness is not of God. Inward experience is very precious ; it is indispensable. A growing inward consciousness of our "keeping God's commandments,"—or, in other words, of our conformity of mind and heart and will to God's character and law,—a growing inward consciousness of the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace—we must have ; and we must seek to have it more and more, if we would have real communion with God. But if we are rightly exercised, how will this affect our views of "Christ come in the flesh,"—our feeling of our need of him and of his exclusive sufficiency for us ? Will it make us at all the less inclined to be ever looking to Christ, ever leaning on Christ, ever laying hold of Christ, ever having recourse to Christ, and that blood of Christ which cleanseth from all sin ? Nay, on the contrary, our growing acquaintance with God, our growing delight in his law, our growing apprehension of the blessedness of perfect oneness, in nature and in will, with him,—will only give us deeper convictions of sin, and open up to us new and fresh discoveries of our corruption and our guilt, and lead us to be ever saying, with reference not to past but to present evil in us : "O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from the body of this death ?"—and to be ever taking refuge in Paul's last stronghold—"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners ; of whom I am chief."

Let us then, acting upon the belief that "whatsoever we ask, we receive of him," be ever asking God to give us the Holy Spirit, that we may know experimentally his dwelling in us. We cannot have too much of this gift of the Spirit, if it is indeed the Spirit "confessing Christ" that we ask God to give. We need not be afraid of having too much of the inward fruit of the Spirit; nor need we shrink from recognising the Spirit given to us by God as the spirit of assurance; "the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." If indeed we find ourselves leaning to the imagination that we have got past the stage at which we need to be living, as sinners, upon Christ the Saviour, and are tempted to live upon inward frames and feelings; putting the Spirit's work in us instead of Christ's work for us; then we do well to beware. But there is really no incompatibility between the two; our coveting, asking and obtaining more and more of the inward testimony of the Spirit, and our being by that very testimony—as it unfolds to us more and more God's high ideal and our sad coming short of it—shut up more and more into Christ as the Lamb of God;—with whose atoning blood and justifying righteousness we feel more and more that we can never for a single moment dispense.

Finally, let us remember that it is in the actual "keeping of God's commandments" that we find all this great mystery of "our dwelling in God and his dwelling in us," practically cleared up. In the onward path of the just, which is as the shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day, we come to know the Spirit

given to us, by his "confessing Jesus Christ as come in the flesh." Let us therefore so keep God's commandments as not to vex or grieve the Holy Spirit. For we do vex and grieve him when our keeping them is either ungracious on the one hand ; or, on the other hand, becomes to us a ground of confidence before God. As the Spirit of God, he is vexed by our submission to God being any other than a submission of the whole heart ; filial altogether, and not servile at all. And as "the Spirit confessing Jesus Christ come in the flesh," he cannot but be vexed if we unduly lean even on his own work in us, to the disparagement of what is the one only ground of a sinner's hope, from first to last, "Christ and him crucified." But let us keep the commandments of God simply, humbly, lovingly ; not as doing any great thing, but only as doing his will, and content that his will be done. So keeping his commandments, we abide in God, and so also we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

XXIX.

OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS EXERCISED IN TRYING THE SPIRITS ; THE TEST, CONFESSING THAT JESUS CHRIST IS COME IN THE FLESH.

“ Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us. Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God ; because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God : Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God : and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God : and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come ; and even now already is it in the world. Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them : because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.”—1 JOHN iii. 24—iv. 4.

THE appeal in the beginning of the fourth chapter springs out of the closing statement in the third : “ Hereby we know that God abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.” This evidently throws us back into ourselves ; into some consciousness on our part of his having given us the Spirit. It is an inward or subjective test. Have we in us the Spirit as given to us by God ? If so, we have the Spirit in us “ confessing that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.” And by his confessing that truth, we may distinguish his indwelling in us from all attempts of any antichristian spirit, or any

false prophets or teachers inspired by an antichristian spirit, to effect a lodgment in our hearts. For this is their characteristic;—they refuse to “confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.”

The meaning of that confession, objectively considered, has been already brought out in what John says of Antichrist as “denying that Jesus is the Christ;”—and so virtually “denying the Father and the Son” (ii. 21-25). I am inclined to think that we have now to deal with it more subjectively; as a matter of inward experience rather than of doctrinal statement. For the starting-point is our “knowing that God abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.” It is the fact of the Spirit confessing in us, and not merely to us, that we have to ascertain and verify; and therefore the test must apply inwardly:—Have we in us “the Spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh?” As it stands here, therefore, I think we are called to deal with that formula rather experimentally than dogmatically; and so to make it all the more available for the searching of our hearts.

Taking that view, I shall consider, in the first place, what the inward confession of the Spirit in us that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh may be held to imply; and then, secondly, how our realising this in our experience secures our personal and practical victory over all antichristian spirits or prophets who deny that great and blessed fact.

I. It properly belongs to the Spirit to “confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.” He had much to do

with the flesh in which Jesus Christ came. He prepared for him a body in the Virgin's womb, so as to secure that he came into the world pure and sinless. And all throughout his sojourn on earth the Spirit ministered to him as "Jesus Christ come in the flesh;" he could not minister to him otherwise. It is the flesh, or humanity, of Jesus Christ that brings him within the range of the Spirit's gracious care. It was his human experience that the Spirit animated and sustained; and it is with his human experience also that the Spirit deals when he "takes of what is Christ's and shows it unto us." His object is to make us one with "Jesus Christ as come in the flesh." That practically is his confession to us and in us. Let us see what it implies.

1. He identifies us with Jesus Christ in his humiliation. There is no real humiliation on the part of the Son if his coming in the flesh is denied. He might be conceived of as coming gloriously, graciously, condescendingly, in his own original and eternal nature alone; taking the mere semblance of a body, or a real body now and then, as the Gnostic dreamers taught. But there would have been no humbling of himself in that, and no room for any concurrent humbling testimony or work of the Spirit in us. It is Jesus Christ as come in the flesh, "made of a woman, made under the law," that the Spirit owns and seals. And he confesses or witnesses this in us by making us one, and keeping us one, with our Lord in that character, as "Jesus Christ come in the flesh." In our divine regeneration he brings us to be,—what, through his interposition, Jesus Christ

in his miraculous human generation became,—servants under the yoke; subject to the authority and commandment of God; willingly subject; our nature being renewed into the likeness of his.

2. The Spirit identifies us with Jesus Christ, not only in his humiliation but in its conditions and liabilities. For “to confess Jesus Christ come in the flesh,” is not merely to admit the fact of his incarnation, but to admit it with whatever consequences necessarily, in terms of law, flow from it. His coming in the flesh is not simply an incident or event in history; it has a special meaning in the moral government of God. It brought him, not merely into the position of one made under the law, but into the position, under the law, of those whose place he took.

The old deniers of his coming in the flesh saw this; and it was their chief objection to the doctrine. They might have allowed that the mysterious efflux or emanation of Deity that they seemed to own as a sort of Saviour did somehow identify himself with us, by making common cause with us, and even temporarily assuming our nature with a view to purge and elevate it. But they perceived that the literal incarnation of the Son of God, truly and fairly admitted, carried in its train the vicarious substitution and atonement. Modern teachers in the same line think that they may hold the first without the last. But I am mistaken if any incarnation they may thus hold does not slip insensibly, in their handling of it, into some modification, suited to modern turns of thought, of the old vague notion of a

certain divinity being in every man; and in some one man perhaps pre-eminently as the type and model of perfect manhood. That, however, is not to “confess Jesus Christ come in the flesh;” for his coming in the flesh, accepted as a reality, implies his really putting himself alongside of those in whose flesh he comes, and serving himself heir to all the ills to which their flesh is heir.

Let us look, then, at “Jesus Christ coming in the flesh,”—the Son of God taking our nature into oneness with himself. He takes it pure and sinless, so far as he is personally concerned; but he takes it with all the liabilities which our sin has entailed upon it. And the Spirit, confessing in us that he is come in the flesh, makes us one with him in this view of his coming; our guilt and condemnation being now his, and his taking our guilt and bearing our condemnation being ours. His coming in the flesh is his consenting to be crucified for us; the Spirit in us confessing him as come in the flesh makes us willing to be crucified with him. And so, by means of this confession, the true Spirit of God and of Christ opens to us a prospect of glory and joy such as no lying spirit of antichrist can hold out. If it was not really in the flesh that he came,—or if, coming in the flesh, he failed to redeem by substitution those whose flesh he shared,—then flesh, or human nature, can have little hope of reaching the blessedness of heaven. But having really come in the flesh, and in the flesh suffered for sin, he raises the flesh in which he suffered to the highest capacity of holy and happy being. “In

my flesh I shall see God," was the hope of the patriarch Job. It is made sure by Jesus Christ come in the flesh, and by the Spirit confessing in us that he is come.

II. This accordingly is the secret of our present victory over antichristian spirits and men: "Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them" (ver. 4). The intimation (ver. 3) that the spirit of antichrist is already, even now, in the world, is fitted to make this assurance very welcome. For war is proclaimed; war that is to last as long as the world lasts. It is the old war, proclaimed long ago, between the serpent's seed and the woman's. But it has taken a new form; and that its final one. From the first manifestation of it,—from the day when Cain slew his brother,—it might be seen to turn upon the question of the worship of God by atoning sacrifice. Is there, or is there not, to be the shedding of blood for the remission of sins? That, more or less clearly, with variations suited to the varied aspect of the church and the world, has ever since continued to be in substance the point at issue. Now that Christ has come in the flesh, it is so more than ever. "Jesus Christ come in the flesh" is its ultimate expression and embodiment. In the contest about this high theme, "you, little children, have overcome them." The victory is already yours: for "you are of God."

Two questions here occur:—1. What is the nature of the victory? 2. How is it connected with your being of God?

1. The victory is a real victory got over the false prophets or teachers, who are not of God,—whom the

spirit of antichrist inspires. And it is a victory over them personally; not over their doctrines and principles merely; but over themselves: "Ye have overcome them." True, it is, in a sense, a war of doctrines or of principles that is waged; its field of battle is the field of argument and controversy. You and they meet in discussion and debate; and when you succeed in refuting their reasonings, you may feel the complacency of a personal triumph over them as, vanquished, they seem to quit the field. But even though vanquished they may argue still. They are silenced, merely, and not subdued; and their silence is only for a time. You may soon have the battle to fight over again; and in the incessant fighting of it, you may be doomed to suffer wounds, in your temper at least, if not in your faith; in your equanimity of spirit towards men, if not in your peace of mind within yourselves, or even your peace with God. I cannot think that that is the victory on which John congratulates his "little children" so affectionately.

No doubt such victory is valuable, as the sort of war in which it is won is inevitable. It is idle to affect to run down controversy, as long as there is error abroad among men. It is mere prudery to be always groaning over the symptoms of irritability which controversialists have exhibited, and bemoaning evermore their lack of a smooth and oily tongue. All honour to the champions of God's holy word and blessed gospel, who have waxed valiant in fight against the adversaries of both! All sympathy with them in their indignant sense of what touches the glory and insults the majesty of him whose

battles they fight ; with large allowance for the heats into which, being but men, they may suffer their zeal to hurry them ! And all thankful joy in the success with which they wield the weapons of their keen logic, their learned study, their burning eloquence, in baffling the sophistries of heresy and infidelity, and rearing an impregnable defence around the battlements on which the banner is planted which God "has given to them that fear him, that it may be displayed because of the truth !"

But that is not exactly the victory which is here meant when it is said, "ye have overcome them." For what really is your contest with them ? It is not about an abstract proposition, a mere article in a creed. It is not whether you can prove that Jesus of Nazareth was man as well as God, or God as well as man,—or they can prove the reverse. No. "Jesus Christ come in the flesh" is not with you a mere matter of disputation. It is a pregnant and significant fact in God's government of the universe, grasped by you as such, and apprehended as such in your experience. By faith you know and feel what it means. You identify yourself with him in his coming in the flesh ; consciously and with entire community of mind and heart ; and in the very doing of this you "have already overcome them."

For it is the fact that they dislike ; not argument about the fact. It is the actual "coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh," and his actual accomplishment, in the flesh, of all that in the flesh he came for, that they resent and resist. It is that which Satan, the original spirit of

antichrist, would fain have set himself to hinder ; moving Herod to slay Jesus in his childhood, and Judas to betray him in his manhood ; tempting Jesus himself to make shipwreck of his integrity. And it is your actual personal participation with him, as “Jesus Christ come in the flesh ;” your being really one with him in that wondrous humiliation, in its spirit and its fruit ; that, so far as you are concerned, they seek to frustrate. In realising that, you get the better of them ; confessing thus Jesus Christ come in the flesh, you have overcome them. It is not that you are able to discuss with them, as debatable questions in argument, the reality and the meaning of Jesus Christ having come in the flesh, You may have to do so, and if you do so on a clear call of duty, you are sure of divine support and help ; perhaps even of success and triumph. But that is not your having already overcome them. Very gladly would they often drag you into this snare ; making you mistake the chance of overcoming them in a discussion about Jesus Christ come in the flesh, for the certainty of your having overcome them through your simply confessing him in that character. But be not drawn down to lower ground. Stand upon your position of oneness with him whom you confess as Jesus Christ come in the flesh. Meet thus any and all antichrists ; antichristian spirits, antichristian prophets. They are not to be overcome. You have already overcome them.

2. Your having overcome them is connected with your “being of God” (ver. 4) ; which again is intimately connected with your “confessing that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh” (ver. 2). Your being of God is the

intermediate link between your confessing that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh (ver. 2) and your having overcome them who reject that truth (ver. 4).

“Ye are of God” (ver. 4). This, let it be observed, is what has previously been asserted of the Spirit that “confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.” He “is of God” (ver. 3). And it is denied concerning any spirit refusing to confess that. Such a spirit “is not of God.”

Now what, as applied to the Holy Spirit, does this mean? How,—in what sense and to what effect,—is the Spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh said to be “of God?”

He is of God essentially, being himself God ; proceeding from the Father and the Son ; one with them in the undivided essence of the Godhead. He is of God, if I may so say, officially ; condescending, in infinite love, to be the gift of the Father and the Son to guilty and sinful men. But here, more particularly, he is of God as confessing, or in virtue of his confessing, that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. He is on the side of God, or in the interest of God ; he consults and acts for God ; he takes God’s part and is true to God. It is as being thus of God that the Spirit confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. He contemplates, if I may so say, that great fact with all its issues from the divine point of view ; in its bearing on the divine character and nature, the divine government and law. He is “of God” in it ; in that fact and in all its issues.

Do I take too great a liberty in speaking thus of the

Holy Ghost? I scarcely think so when I call to mind how this phrase describes Christ's own position in the world with reference to the Father. He was "of God;" he was so in a very emphatic and significant sense; not only as regards his origin and mission; his coming from God and being authorised by God; but also, and specially, as regards his end and aim all through his humiliation, obedience, and sacrifice. He was "of God;" on the side and in the interest of God. It was the zeal of God's house that ate him up. It was the doing of God's will, and the finishing of God's work, that was his meat. It was the glorifying of his Father, and the finishing of the work which his Father gave him to do, that ministered to his satisfaction in his last farewell prayer. Of him pre-eminently it might be said: "He is of God." And in his being thus "of God," as to the whole mind and meaning of the phrase, the Holy Ghost is with him and in him. Jesus Christ come in the flesh is, in this sense emphatically, confessed by the Spirit. The Spirit is with him, and in him, as the Spirit that is of God; and as being to him the Spirit that is of God. He and the Spirit are at one in being both "of God." And you, in the Son and by the Spirit, are "of God;" as truly of God as is the Spirit, or as the Son was when God "gave not the Spirit by measure to him."

The essential characteristic of the spirit of antichrist is that it is, in the sense now explained, "not of God." It does not look at the Saviour and the salvation as on the side of God; rather it takes an opposite view, and subjects God to man. It subordinates everything to

human interests and human claims ; looks at everything from a human and mundane point of view ; measures everything by a human standard ; submits everything to human opinion ; in a word, conceives and judges of God after the manner of man. This, indeed, may be said to be the distinctive feature of all false religions, as well as of all corruptions of the true religion. They exalt man. They consider what man requires, what he would like, what is due to him. Even when they take the form of the most abject and degrading superstition, that is still their spirit. They aim at getting God, by whatever means of persuasion and prostration, to do the bidding of man. For it is the essence of our corrupt human nature, of which these corrupt worships are the expression, to care and consult for self, and not for God. This is the essence of the spirit of antichrist ; the spirit that breathes and moves in the false notions that have gained currency in the church respecting "Jesus Christ come in the flesh." Their advocates give man the first place in their scheme. Their real objection lies against those views of gospel truth which assert the absolute sovereignty of God, and put forward pre-eminently what he is entitled to demand,—what, with a due regard to his own character, government, and law, he cannot but demand. They dislike such representations as bring in the element of God's holy name and righteous authority, and lay much stress upon that element, as one of primary consideration in the plan of saving mercy. Hence they naturally shrink from owning explicitly Jesus Christ as come in the flesh to make atonement by satisfy-

ing divine justice. They prefer some loose and vague way of putting the fact of his interposition, and the manner of it. Admitting in a sense its necessity, they are unwilling to define very precisely, either the nature of the necessity, or the way in which it is met. He came in the flesh, to redeem the flesh, to sanctify, elevate, and purify it. He came in the flesh, to be one with us, and to make us, in the flesh, one with him. So they speak and think of his coming in the flesh. Any higher aim,—any prior and paramount design involved in this great fact, viewed in its relation to the nature and supremacy of God, his holiness and justice, as law-giver and judge,—they are slow to acknowledge. Hence their gospel is apt to be partial and one-sided ;—looking rather like an accommodation of heaven and heaven's rights to earth and earth's wishes and ways, than that perfect reconciliation and perfect assimilation of earth to heaven for which we hold it to have made provision ;—our heavenly Father's name being hallowed, his kingdom coming, his will being done, in earth as it is in heaven. Their system is not “ of God ” as the primary object of consideration ; for they themselves are not out and out, in this sense, “ of God.”

But “ ye are of God, little children,” in this matter ; in the view that you take, and the conception that you form of Jesus Christ come in the flesh ; of the end of his coming, and the manner in which that end is attained. You look at that great fact, first and chiefly in its relation to God, and as on the side of God. It is from God and for God that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. So

he always taught ; and so you firmly believe. He placed God always first ; the glory of God, the sovereignty of God, the will of God, always took precedence. Man's concerns and interests were subordinate to that. Nothing is more conspicuous in "Jesus Christ come in the flesh," throughout his whole ministry, in all his life and in his death, than this loyalty to God his Father, prevailing even over his amazing tenderness and pity for men. He was truly of God, even when his being so might tell against men ; tell to their destruction rather than their salvation. He does not shrink from the darkest issues which, in that view, his coming in the flesh carries in its bosom. He did not shrink from them when realised in his own person, and in his personal experience, as the suffering substitute of the guilty. He does not shrink from them as they are to be realised in the persons, and in the personal experience, of those who "will not come unto him that they may have life."

If you are "of God," you are of his mind. You approve of this principle ; you recognise the propriety of what is due to God being first attended to and provided for, in preference even to what may be needed by man. What God, being such as he is, must require, since "he cannot deny himself," that is the first question ; then, and in subordination to that, what can be done for men. It is a great matter for you to view the whole plan of salvation, as being yourselves, in this sense, "of God." It is your doing so that secures your having overcome all spirits of antichrist. If thus "you are of God," you are already raised to a higher platform than they can

occupy, so as to have a loftier and wider range of vision. Your profound reverence for the majesty of God ; your loyal, loving recognition of his holy and righteous sovereignty ; your deep, admiring esteem of his government and law ; your calm conviction that the Lord reigneth ; your intense desire that the Lord should reign ; your determination, may I say, that the Lord shall reign ; lifts you out of the region of human questionings and all doubtful disputations. It is your very humility that lifts you up. You sit at the feet of Jesus Christ come in the flesh. You stand beside his cross. You do not now stumble at the mystery of its bloody expiation ; or quarrel with the great propitiation-sacrifice through unbelief of its necessity. The ideas of justice needing to be satisfied ; punishment inevitably to be inflicted ; one willing to bear it in your stead being found ; that one being “ Jesus Christ come in the flesh ; ” do not now offend you. Nay, being “ of God ”—on his side and in his interest in the whole of this great transaction,—you can meekly, in faith, commit to him and leave in his hands even the most terrible of those ultimate and eternal consequences,—involving the aggravated guilt and final ruin of many,—that you cannot but see to be inseparably mixed up with the confession that “ Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.”

XXX.

THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST IN US GREATER THAN THE
SPIRIT OF ANTICHRIST IN THE WORLD.

“Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them : because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world : therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God : he that knoweth God heareth us ; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.”—1 JOHN iv. 4-6.

THE security for our full and final victory over antichrist and his spirit lies in the emphatic declaration : “Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.” He that is in you is the Spirit of God ; for “hereby we know that God abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us ;” the Spirit that, being of God, “confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh” (iii. 24 ; iv. 2). He that is in the world is the spirit of antichrist, “whereof ye have heard that it should come, and even now already is it in the world” (iv. 3). Therefore you who “are of God have overcome them,”—“the spirits,” the false prophets, “that are gone out into the world” (iv. 1). They are of the world ; what they speak is of the world and meets with the world’s acceptance (ver. 5). We, the true teachers, are of God ; what we speak is of God ; and meets with the acceptance, not of him who is not of

God, but of him who, being of God, knows God (ver. 6). By this test the spirit of truth which is in us is to be distinguished from the spirit of error that is in them (ver. 6). From whom do we obtain a hearing?

“Ye are of God ;” and your being of God raises you above the risk of being “seduced by false prophets ;” for it enables you to “try the spirits.” “We too are of God.” And this is the proof of it,—that our teaching commends itself, not to the world, but to you who know God and are of God. Between you and us there is a blessed harmony ; between your state of mind as you try the spirits, and our teaching as we stand the trial. You who are hearers, are secure in trying the spirits against all false prophets ; for you have overcome them, being yourselves of God. We who are preachers, being of God as you are, have assurance that our spirit, the spirit of our teaching, is the Spirit of truth, when we see the world hearing them, and only you who are of God and know God hearing us. Thus you and we are both safe ; you who try and we who are tried ; you safe from being misled by false prophets, we safe from being confounded with them. And our joint safety lies in both you and us being “of God.”

Taken thus, this passage bears closely on a deeply interesting subject ; the self-evidencing power of the gospel of Christ in the hands of the Spirit of God. There is a wonderfully gracious correspondence between the spiritual intelligence of the man who is of God and knows God ; and the spiritual intelligibility and acceptability of the teaching which is of God. The two fit

into one another ; the state of mind and heart in the receiver who tests,—and the character of what is submitted to him to be tested. You who test, and we who are tested, are in a close and intimate relation to one another. A common quality unites us ; or a common agency ; opening your eyes to try, and fashioning our doctrine for being tried. The same spirit is in you and in us ; the Spirit that is “ of God ”—the Spirit of truth.

There is something like this on the other side. There is the world ; and there are the false prophets who are of the world. They are mutually related to one another, precisely as you and we are. What you are to us, that the world is to the false prophets. What we are to you, that they are to it. The world knows its own. The teaching which is of the world commends itself to the world. That teaching, therefore, must be antichristian ; for the world is antichristian.

Here, then, are the opposite workings of two opposite powers ; and here is the secret of their greatness. For both are great ; and both are great, not only in themselves, but in their adaptation to those with whom they have to deal.

I. “ He that is in the world is great.” And his greatness lies in this,—that he operates in a twofold way. He forms and fashions the world spiritually ; and he finds for it, or makes for it, appropriate and congenial spiritual food. He creates or moulds the world’s appetite for some sort of religious teaching ; and he inspires for his own ends the religious teaching that is to suit his world and be accepted by it. Hence his false prophets

are sure of their own measure of success ; “ they are of the world : therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them ” (ver. 5).

But he cannot succeed with you who are “ of God ; ” for there is one in you who, great as he is, is greater still. And he also operates in a double way. He gives you inwardly spiritual intelligence, spiritual insight and sympathy, to try ; and he gives you outwardly spiritual truth to be tried. You are yourselves of God, and therefore competent to judge what we speak. And we too, being of God, speak what cannot be acceptable to the world, but only to him who is of God, and knows God. Thus what you are prepared to apprehend and appreciate, and what we are moved to speak, harmonise and are at one. It is all the doing of “ him who dwelleth in you,” and of whom “ we know,” through your acceptance of our teaching, “ that he is not the spirit of error, but the Spirit of truth.”

Look for a little at the world, and him that is in the world. He is great, undeniably great ; great in power and wisdom ; in command of resources and subtlety in the use of them. He has largely, as to its moral and spiritual tastes and tendencies, the making of the world in which he is, and of which he is the moving soul. The world, in a sense, lives, and moves, and has its being, in him. He is in it as the spring of its activities, the dictator of its laws, the guider of its pursuits and pleasures ; in a word, “ the ruler of its darkness.” The darkness of its deep alienation from God, he rules. And he rules it very specially for the purpose of getting the world to be con-

tented with an image, instead of the reality, of godliness. For he knows well enough that the world is, and must be, in a sense and after a fashion, religious. He cannot put it off with the "no God" which the fool would fain say in his heart. He is far too sagacious and shrewd to attempt that. What he does attempt is a much more plausible device. He takes advantage of whatever may be the world's mood at the time, as regards God and his worship; throws himself into it; controlling or inflaming it, as he may see cause, so as to turn it to his own account. And then he contrives to bring under his sway prophets or teachers; not always consciously false; often meaning to be true; able men; holy men; men of God and of prayer; pre-eminently so it may be. And bringing into contact the world which he has doctored and the doctors whom he has tutored, he adjusts them skilfully to one another. He causes his teachers, perhaps insensibly, to draw much of their inspiration from the particular world which, as to its religious bias, he has influenced with an eye to their teaching. And so "they are of the world; therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them."

Numberless instances and illustrations might be brought forward here; reaching from the grossest corruptions that have ever disgraced the name of religion, to the most refined forms of ingenious speculation that have ever imposed on the fancy of the most devout enthusiast, or the feelings of the most amiable. They might all, I believe, be explained on the principle now

suggested. There is one in the world who is great ; great in a religious point of view ; great in his power and skill to master and manage, from age to age, the world's ever-changing fits and fashions of religiousness ; great in the strange and terrible command he often wields over the most gifted, and even the most godly, of the prophets or teachers who have to deal with them.

Thus, if the world, at his instigation, wants a golden calf, there is an Aaron, under his influence, ready to provide one. If the people, moved by him, will have smooth things spoken to them, he has prophets of smooth things prepared for them. If men are growing weary of the old wine ; and he will be but too glad to make them more weary of it, and help them also to excuses for their weariness ; it shall go hard but he will mix plenty of new wine for their use. It is not he who has to take up the complaint ;—nor his agents either ;—“ We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced ; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.” He is in and among the crowd of those to whom “the children in the market-place are to cry.” And “the children who are to cry” are his ministers. He can prepare the crowd to hear, and move the children to cry, according to his good pleasure ; so that there shall be flock for pastor and pastor for flock ; people for priest and priest for people ; the times for the teaching and the teaching for the times ; all in perfect harmony. Yes ; he that is in the world is great ; great in his ability to make the world,—the world in the church,—what he would have it to be ; great in his ability to find and fit and fashion ministers

and agents, who, being of the world, as regards its religious tastes and tendencies, will "speak of the world," and whom, therefore, the "world will hear."

There is, indeed, a power or law of action and reaction between the world and its prophets—the world in the church and its false prophets,—which, as indicating the greatness of him who is in the world, deserves very careful notice. The world in the church, I repeat. For I have nothing to do now,—John here takes nothing to do,—with the world outside of the church, the world of those who do not even profess to be religious; his sole concern is with the church, and the spirits in the church that are to be tried, and the parties that are to try them. Satan, the spirit of antichrist, has within the church a world of his own,—a world in which he is, and is great. And he is great in it, very much through his making skilful and sagacious use of this law of action and reaction, between what the world craves and what its false prophets give.

Do you suppose that if you have "itching ears," there will not be found preachers who, catching perhaps unconsciously the contagion from you, will feed and foster the disease? If you incline to a gospel explaining away the atonement, and reducing the incarnation to a mere glorifying of humanity in the mass, instead of its being the redemption, by substitution, of individual men,—a gospel of that vague sort will soon be forthcoming. If, in any church or congregation, there springs up a craving for excitement, a demand for novelty, which the old preaching of the cross fails to satisfy; if a certain restless

prurience of spiritual taste begins to manifest itself ; if a cry or a sigh for gifts and miracles, for signs and wonders, is heard ; all experience, all history, proves that it will not be long before men appear who, carried away themselves and led off their feet by the strong tide, will prove apt and able agents in encouraging others to try the virtue of its flowing waves. It is not that they purposely or dishonestly accommodate their teaching and prophesying to the spirit that may be abroad in their world. They drink it in themselves ; it intoxicates their own souls. "They are of the world : therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them." Truly great is he that is in the world ; great in adapting the world and its prophets very perfectly to one another.

II. But "greater is he that is in you, little children," for he is the Lord God Almighty. He is strong ; and he "strengthens you with might by his Spirit in the inner man ; Christ dwelling in your heart by faith ; and you being rooted and grounded in love." He is strong ; and he makes you strong ; strong in holding fast the form of sound words, and contending earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints ; strong in cleaving to the truth as it is in Jesus ; strong in your real, personal, close, and loving acquaintance with him, "whom to know is life eternal." He who is in you is God ; God abiding in you ; giving you the Spirit. He is in you ; not merely on your side, at your right hand, around you ; but within you. He is working in you ; so working in you as to secure your safe triumph, in this great fight of

truth against error, over the world and him who is in it. And his working in you is of the same sort as is the working of his great antagonist in and among those with whom he is so busy.

He makes you, who are of God, to be men of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord ; quick to apprehend what they who are of God are moved by him to speak. He takes these two things : the mind or heart of the learner or inquirer who is of God, and what is spoken by the apostle or teacher who also is of God. He adapts them to one another, brings them together, welds them into one. So he insures that what we who are of God speak, however it may be received by the world, shall prove acceptable to you who know God and are of God. He imparts to you, in whom he is, a certain spiritual tact or taste,—call it spiritual intelligence, spiritual insight, spiritual discernment,—by means of which he enables you to recognise, in what you hear or read or remember, the very truth of the true and living God, sanctifying and saving to your own souls. He brings out in you, palpably to your own consciousness, the marvellous correspondence that there is between the heart with which he is inwardly dealing and the word or doctrine which, through the teaching of men of God, he is outwardly presenting. He is in you ;—breaking your heart in deep conviction of sin, and then healing the broken heart, oh ! how tenderly, by the sprinkling of atoning blood. He is in you ;—causing the commandment so to come home to you that you die, helplessly condemned, under the righteous sentence of the law,

and then bringing near to you, oh ! how lovingly, the life-giving assurance that "there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." He is in you ;—causing you to see and feel that instead of "being rich and having need of nothing, you are poor, and wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked," and then pressing upon you, oh ! how graciously, the Lord's affectionate counsel to buy of him "freely," without money and without price, "gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich ; and white raiment, that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness do not appear ; and to anoint your eyes with eye-salve, that you may see." He is in you ;—forming you for Christ and forming Christ in you. He is in you ;—fitting your whole inner man for Christ, and fitting Christ into your whole inner man. He is in you ;—so as to cause to spring up from the very depths of your spirit a sense of intimate oneness, not to be broken, between you and Christ,—between your highest faculty of belief and thought, and his doctrine, which now "you know to be of God." What precisely the bond of this oneness may be,—in what exactly it consists,—you may not be able to define. Probably, at bottom, it is the recognition in your heart now, as in Christ's doctrine always, of the high and holy sovereignty of God ; his just supremacy. It is the joint owning, in your heart and in Christ's doctrine, of the great truth—"The Lord reigneth." But be it what it may, you feel it. And the feeling of it is your assured confidence and satisfying rest.

I cannot now pursue the subject further. Let me

simply, in closing, exhort you to consider well in what it is that your security lies, when you are called to try the spirits—what it is that alone can give you certain and decisive victory over the false prophets. It is God being in you ; abiding in you ; giving you the Spirit. The spirit of antichrist is in the world ; in the church's world ; in the worldly materials of which, in too large a measure, the church is composed. "Many false prophets are gone out into the world." The spirit of error, as well as the spirit of truth, is abroad ; and it may be that sifting, trying, critical days are at hand. What is to be your protection ? How are you to be prepared ? Let me warn you that it is not head knowledge that will do ; not logic, or rhetoric, or philosophy, or theology ; not creeds, or catechisms, or confessions ; not early training in the soundest manual ; not familiarity with the ablest and most orthodox writings ; not skill in argument and debate ;—no ; nothing will do but God being in you ; in your heart, your heart of hearts ; God in Christ dwelling in you ; God giving you the Spirit. An experimental assurance alone will keep you safe. But that will keep you safe. For as he that is not of God will not hear us who speak as being of God,—so he that knoweth God will not hear the false prophets. So the Good Shepherd himself assures us. He "goeth before the sheep, and they follow him, for they know his voice ; and a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him, for they know not the voice of strangers." "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow



me : and I give unto them eternal life ; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all ; and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one."

PART THIRD.

ULTIMATE CONDITION OF THE DIVINE
FELLOWSHIP—LOVE.

XXXI.

LOVE IS OF GOD—GOD IS LOVE.

“ Beloved, let us love one another : for love is of God ; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God ; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”—1 JOHN iv. 7-10.

LIGHT, Righteousness, Love ;—these are the three conditions or elements of that fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ in which John would have us to be joint partakers with himself and the other apostles (i. 3). Of the three, Light and Righteousness have been the heads, or leading thoughts, of the two previous parts of this Exposition (iii.-xvii. and xviii.-xxx.) Love is the ruling idea in the third part (xxxi.-xxxiv.) ; love being the end to which the others are means ; the consummation of the fellowship being in love. Hence there has been some anticipation of this last theme, Love, in the two preceding ones, Light and Righteousness ; especially

in the latter. For the righteousness meant being chiefly subjective ; denoting singleness of eye, uprightness, honesty of purpose, a guileless spirit, truth in the inward parts ;—necessarily refers to the matters about which it is objectively exercised,—the manner of dealing with God in light, and with our fellowmen in love, which it prompts and regulates. Hence that second part, having Righteousness for its key-note, carries on the line of thought begun in the first part under the idea of Light, and encroaches on the line of thought in the third, which brings out the crowning aspect of the whole in Love. Still it is manifestly Love that is now purely and simply the reigning principle.

“ Beloved, let us love one another.” The distinction of the personal pronouns is here dropped. It was proper when the trying of the spirits by a sort of doctrinal test was the matter in hand. John must then speak of himself and his fellow-teachers in the first person, and to us in the second. Now, however, when love is the test, all are one. It is the trial of the spirits that still is on hand, in pursuance of the intimation formerly given (iii. 24) :—“ Hereby we know that God abideth in us, by the spirit which he hath given us.” That intimation is connected with the double commandment in the previous verse (23), “ that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he has given us commandment.” The question is about assurance ; our “ assuring our hearts before God ;” our “ having confidence toward God ;” our “ having boldness in the day of judg-

ment" (iii. 19, 21; and iv. 17). The indispensable condition of this confidence is righteousness, or "our own hearts not condemning us" of insincerity or guile (iii. 20, 21). But though that is an essential preliminary, it is not itself the ground or warrant of the confidence. The real ground or warrant is "our abiding in God and his abiding in us" (iii. 24). But how is this mutual abiding of us in God and of God in us to be ascertained and verified, to the satisfaction of our own consciousness, as a trustworthy ground and warrant of assured confidence before God? On our part there is "the keeping of his commandments;" his double "commandment, to believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another in obedience to him." On his part, there is "his giving us the Spirit." And the last is tested by the first. His giving us the Spirit is not to be lightly taken for granted. There must be a trial; and the trial is in accordance with the twofold commandment, to believe and to love. It is first a trial turning upon the confession or denial that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh (iv. 1-6). It is next a trial turning on the possession or the want of love (iv. 7-12). And the result of the trial is announced: "Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit" (iv. 13);—almost in the same terms in which the trial is, as it were, instituted: "Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us" (iii. 24).

Thus it plainly appears that these two things,—righteousness in owning the true doctrine concerning

Christ and righteousness in mutual brotherly love,—are closely bound together. And thus, by a natural and simple transition, the discourse passes from the first of these topics to the second : “ Beloved, let us love one another.”

This exhortation is here enforced both positively and negatively ;—positively, by the statement that “ love is of God,” and therefore “ every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God ” (ver. 7) ;—negatively, by the opposite statement : “ he that loveth not knoweth not God ; for God is love ” (ver. 8).

I. “ Love is of God.” This does not mean merely that love comes from God, and has its source in God ; that he is the author or creator of it. All created things are of God, for by him all things were made, and on him they all depend. But love is not a created thing. No doubt, in the heart even of an unfallen intelligence, it may be said to be created, inasmuch as the being in whose heart it dwells is himself created. And in the heart of a fallen man it is in that sense a new creation ; for he himself must be created anew or born again if he is to love. Still, the love to which he is created anew or born again is not itself created. It is not of God, as made by him ; as a new thing called into existence by the fiat of his word.

In this respect love differs from light. It is not asserted of love as of light : And God said, Let there be love, and there was love. In a higher sense than that, I apprehend, it is true that love, wherever it exists, is of God. It is communicated, not created ; begotten, one

might say, not made. It is a divine property, a divine affection. And it is of its essence to be communicative and begetting ; to communicate itself, and, as it were, beget its own likeness. "Love is of God." It is not merely of God, as every good gift is of God. It is of God, as being his own property, his own affection, his own love. It is, wherever it is found, the very love wherewith God loveth. If it is found in me, it is my loving with the very love with which God loves ; it is my loving with a divine love,—a love that is thus emphatically of God. Hence the sufficiency and certainty of the test : "Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God."

1. None but one born of God can thus love, with the love which, in this sense, is of God ; therefore one who so loves must needs be one who is born of God. This is almost self-evident. If the love in question is not, like any of the constituent parts of the created universe, whether of matter or of mind, a thing made, called into being out of nothing,—or a thing made over again, formed out of chaos into order,—but part and parcel of the Divine Being himself, of his very essence,—then its existence in me cannot be explained on any other supposition than that of my being born of him ; born of him too in a very close and intimate manner ; in a manner implying that I become "partaker of his nature ;" "his seed abiding in me." I doubt, therefore, if this love formed an element in that image of God in which man was originally created. I take it to be something more. It is communicated,—it is of God in such a sense that it

can be communicated,—not by creation, but only by generation. It is not as a creature that I can have it, in virtue of any mere creative *fiat* or let it be. I can have it only as a Son,—adopted?—nay, not adopted only, but begotten. Many excellent endowments I may have as a mere creature; endowments reflecting the likeness of God's own attributes; intelligence resembling his; a sense of right and wrong resembling his; benevolence and kindness resembling his. As to these, God has merely, in creating me, or creating me anew, to speak and it is done. But this love is something quite peculiar. It is something, as I take it, different from the love enjoined in the “royal law,”—“Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” It is the very love with which the Father loves, the love manifested in his not sparing his beloved Son. It is the very love with which the Son loves, the love proved by his laying down his life for us. That is the love, the love of the “new commandment,” which is here in question. Respecting that love I think it may be said that God alone is originally capable of it. Others are capable of it, only in so far as God communicates himself to them; not by a process of mere creative power; but by begetting them into participation with himself in his own very life.

There is one thus eternally begotten; begotten before all worlds; the eternal Son of the everlasting Father. He is “God of God; very God of very God; light of light;” nay, rather, love of love. He is the manifestation of this love which is of God;—“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent

his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." It shines forth in him ; not through him, or by him, merely ; but in him. God sent his Son to manifest this love. How ? Evidently by his showing that he shared it ; approving himself to be born of God by himself loving with the love which is of God. God sent his only begotten Son into the world to give us a specimen, an illustration,—perhaps the only possible perfect specimen, the only possible perfect illustration,—of "the love which is of God." None but his only begotten Son could be sent to manifest it ; for none but he could fully feel it. No created being, not the highest of the elect and unfallen angels, even when perfected by their trial, could adequately feel it. And therefore none of them could manifest it. But the only begotten Son, dwelling from everlasting in the Father's bosom, of one nature with the Father, loves with "the love which is of God." Therefore he is sent to manifest that love. He is sent to manifest a love essentially different from any love of which we are naturally capable, or of which we can naturally form any conception,—a love peculiarly and distinctively divine.

Now, as it is his being the only begotten Son of the Father that qualifies him for being sent to manifest the love which is thus "of God," inasmuch as it is that which ensures his feeling it,—it is that alone which makes him capable of it ; so it is only your being in the Son, being born of God by the Spirit, that can make you capable of this love which is of God, and can ensure your feeling it. None can love with that love which is

of God,—none can love as God loves,—save only first his only begotten Son, whom on that very account he sends to manifest this love, and then you who in him receive the adoption of sons, and are begotten by the Spirit into participation with the Son in his filial oneness and sympathy with the Father. Therefore, if we love one another with that love which is of God,—if we love as God loves,—we must be born of God. We must have become his children, his sons ; begotten of him in time, through believing union with the Son who is begotten of him from eternity ; the Spirit making us, as thus born of God, in the only begotten Son, really “partakers,” in respect of this love, “of the divine nature.”

2. Being born of God implies knowing God. This consideration still further explains and illustrates the point before us :—“Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.” He loves with God’s own love, because, being born of God, he knows God. He knows God, as none but one born of God can know him. It is a knowledge of God altogether peculiar ; belonging exclusively to the relation constituted by, and realised in, your being born of God. It is a kind of knowledge of God of which, as I think, one who is simply a creature of God’s hand,—a subject of his moral administration,—however intelligent and however informed, is not really capable. He is not in a condition—he lacks the capacity—to take it in. He must be a child, a son, born of God, if he is to have it. For, in a word, it is the very knowledge of God which his Son has ; his only begotten Son, whom he sent into the world to manifest his love. He, being

of God, as his only begotten Son, knows God ; he, and he alone. "No man hath seen God at any time ; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John i. 18). "No man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son shall reveal him" (Matt. xi. 27). It is as his only begotten Son that Jesus knows God. And it is as born of God that you know God ; know him even as his only begotten Son knows him. He, as the only begotten Son, knows God ; he knows the love which is of God,—of what sort it is ; he has himself, from everlasting, been the object of it ; he has been ever experiencing it. All that is in the great heart of God the Father, the only begotten Son knows intimately ; and experimentally, if I may dare to say so. With a filial knowledge he knows God. With filial insight and filial sympathy, he knows all the overflowing of that love which is of God as it gushes forth in deep, full flood, from everlasting, first towards himself, and then through him towards the family of man ; according to his own glorious word—"The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his ways. When he appointed the foundations of the earth, then I was with him as one brought up with him ; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him ; rejoicing in the habitable parts of his earth ; and my delights were with the sons of men" (Prov. viii. 22-31).

Now it is with the same knowledge with which he, as the only begotten Son, knows God, that you, as born of God, know him ; with a knowledge the same in kind, however far short it may come in measure or degree.

Yours, like his, is a filial knowledge ; implying filial insight and filial sympathy. Your being born of God makes you capable of this knowledge, and places you in the only position in which you can have it. Born of God, you occupy the very filial position that he who is the only begotten Son occupies ; you have the very filial heart that he has. You are born of the very Spirit of which he, in your nature, was born. You have in you the very Spirit that dwelt, not by measure, in him. Thus, born of God, you are one with him who is his only begotten Son. To you as to him, to you in him, God is known,—and the love which is of God is known,—by close personal acquaintance ; by blessed personal experience. How God loves ; how it is the manner of God to love ; what sort of love his is ; love going out of self ; love sacrificing self ; love imparting and communicating self ; love unsought and unbought ; unconditional and unreserved ;—what kind of being, in respect of love, God is ; you who are born of God know, even as the only begotten Son knows. Therefore you can love with that “love which is of God,” even as he loves with that love which is of God. He and you alone can so love ; for he that loves as God loves must needs be one who “is born of God and knoweth God.”

II. The opposite statement follows as a matter of course :—“He that loveth not knoweth not God ; for God is love.” The connecting link here is all-important ; it is “knowing God ;” all turns on that. Every one that loveth knoweth God—he that loveth not knoweth not God ; these are the antagonist statements. The

stress of the contrast is made to rest on knowing or not knowing God ; he who loveth knoweth God, being born of him ; “ he who loveth not, knoweth not God ; for God is love.”

“ God is love ;”—therefore, not to love is not to know God. That is a very clear and simple inference. But why this change ? Why is it said, on the first or positive side of the dilemma, “ Love is of God ; ” and on the second or negative side of it, “ God is love ? ” Simply because the question now turns on knowing God ; not anything of God, but God himself. To love with the love which is of God, is to know God ; not to love thus, is not to know God ; for God is love. In this view, the proposition, “ God is love,” really applies to both of the alternative ways of putting the case ; the positive and the negative alike. It assigns the reason why it may be said, on the one hand, “ Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God ; ” and why it may also be said, on the other hand, “ He that loveth not knoweth not God.”

“ God is love.” It is a necessity of his nature, it is his very nature, to love. He cannot exist without loving. He cannot but love. He is, he has ever been, love. From all eternity, from before all worlds, God is love. Love never is or can be, never was or could be, absent from his being. He never is or can be God,—he never was or could be God,—without being also love ; without loving. I say without loving ; actually loving.

For this love, which is thus identified with his very being, is not dormant or quiescent ; potential merely ;

in posse, and not *in esse*. Love in God never is, never has been, like a latent germ, needing outward influences to make it spring up ; or like a slumbering power, waiting for occasions to call it forth. If it were so, it could not truly be said that in himself, in his very manner of being, "God is love." It is, it has ever been, active, forthgoing, self-manifesting, self-communicating. It is, it has ever been, in exercise. Before creation it is so. In the bosom of the everlasting Father is his eternal, only begotten Son ; and with the Father and the Son is the Holy Ghost. So "God is love" before all creation ; love in exercise ; love not possible merely but actual ; love forthgoing and communicative of itself ; from the Father, the fountain of deity, to the Son ; from the Father and the Son to the Holy Ghost. In creation, this love is seen forthgoing and communicative in a new way towards new objects. The love which from everlasting has been in exercise evermore within the mysterious circle of the Three-One God ; which especially has been evermore passing from the Father to his only-begotten Son ; now seeks and finds new means of manifesting itself among created beings. It is still really the same love. For all creation is the manifestation of God's love to his only begotten Son. He "made all things by him and for him." He has "appointed him to be heir of all things." Specially when that wondrous council was held in heaven from whence issued the decree, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness," this love was manifested. The only begotten Son is to be the first born among many brethren. Not however by

creation merely is that end to be reached ; another manifestation of this same love must intervene. Created innocence is not enough to secure the issue on which God's heart of love is set ; for created innocence may and does give way. Sin enters, and death by sin ; all sin, and all are doomed. Still " God is love ; " the same love as ever. And " in this now is manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

It is, I say, the same love still ; the love which from everlasting goes forth from God to his only begotten Son dwelling in his bosom, the love which in the beginning of creation goes forth in God's making all things by and for his only begotten Son, and especially making godlike men to be his brethren ; it is the very same love that goes forth in God's sending his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him ; sending his son to be the propitiation for our sins. It is wondrous love ; love passing knowledge ; love of which God alone is capable ; love proper to his great heart alone. It is not such love as we may feel to him ; for " herein is love, not that we have loved him, but that he has loved us." He has loved us with the very love which is his own essential nature ; which has been going forth from everlasting, self-manifesting, self-communicating, from the Father to his only begotten Son, by the Spirit ; and has been going forth in time, through his only begotten Son, by the same Spirit, to

the world of creation at first, and now also to the world that is to be saved.

This is its crowning glory ; the saving mission from God of his only begotten Son. It is consummated in our "living through him," through his "being the propitiation for our sins." For now, effectual atonement being made for our guilt,—our redemption and reconciliation being righteously and therefore surely effected by his being the propitiation for our sins,—we, living through him, are his brethren indeed. The love wherewith God loves him dwells in us. God loves us even as he loves him. And so at last the love which, from all eternity, it is of the very nature of God's essential being to feel and exercise, finds its full fruition in the "mighty multitude of all kindreds, and peoples, and nations, and tongues, who stand before the throne and give glory to him who sitteth thereon and to the Lamb for ever and ever."

If this is anything like a true account of the sense in which, and the effect to which, it is said that "God is love," the statement becomes almost axiomatic,—*"He that loveth not knoweth not God."* The fact of his not loving plainly proves that he knows not God ; and his not knowing God explains and accounts for the fact of his not loving. How indeed can he know God ; know him as being love ? To know God thus, as being love, implies some measure of congeniality, sympathy, and fellowship. I cannot so know him if there is still a great gulf between him and me ; between his heart and my heart ; his nature and my nature. There must be community of heart and nature between him and me ; I must be "born of God."

We thus come back to the previous positive declaration: "Love is of God; and he that loveth is born of God and knoweth God." And we see what manner of love it is that must be the test of our being born of God, how it is that we are to love one another. We are to love with the love which is of God,—the love which is his nature. We are to love as he loves; to love all whom he loves; and to love them with his own love.

First and chiefly, we are to love, as he loves his only begotten Son. Our thus loving him is one primary criterion and touchstone of our being born of God. So he himself intimates when he says to the Jews,—“If God were your Father ye would love me” (John viii. 42). There would be this feature of family resemblance, this community of heart and nature, between him whom you claim as your Father and you who say you are his children, that you would love me because he loves me, and love me as he loves me;—love me as sent by him to be the Saviour of the world. Hence the force of that awful apostolic denunciation; “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maran-atha.”

Then we are to love, as God loves it, and because God loves it, the world which he sent his Son to save. We are to love thus one another; with what intensity of longing, like God's own longing and yearning, for one another's salvation, that all may turn and live; and with what intensity of delight in all who are really in Christ, who “live through him,” and live so as to be indeed our brethren and his,—ours because they are his!

XXXII.

LOVE GOING FORTH TOWARDS WHAT IS SEEN.

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.”—1 JOHN iv. 10-12.

THERE is very close and compressed reasoning here. The steps in the process,—the links in the chain,—are not all patent or obvious on the surface ; some intermediate bonds of connection need to be supplied. Thus, the assertion (ver. 12), “No man hath seen God at any time,” seems intended to answer by anticipation a question that might be put, as to the omission of love to God in the preceding verse (ver. 11). Otherwise it is, so far as one can see, irrelevant. “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love”—God ;—that is what we might naturally expect to be the logical inference ; but it is not so ; it is “we ought also to love one another.” And why ? “Because no man hath seen God at any time.” Therefore, love to one another is made the test of “God dwelling in us.” And it is so, all the rather, because it is “the perfecting of his love in us” (ver. 12).

Two general principles are here indicated as regards this divine love ; I. It must have a visible object ; or, in other words, it must be real and practical, and not

merely ideal and sentimental. II. It is thus not only proved but perfected ; it has its free course and is consummated.

I. Love, if it is to be a sufficient and satisfactory test of our "knowing God and being born of God," must have a visible object ;—it cannot otherwise be verified to our own consciousness as real. In a sense, it may be said even of God's own love, the love which is his nature, that it thus verifies as well as manifests itself. It goes forth towards created beings ;—it seeks created beings towards whom it may go forth. A visible created universe is its object : and so also, in a peculiar manner and degree, is a visible new created church. Only in its exercise towards such objects can its true character,—its communicative and self-sacrificing character,—be thoroughly brought out.

It exists, no doubt, and is in exercise, before all creation, the first creation as well as the new. In the mystery of the Trinity, in the ineffable fellowship of the three persons in the one divine essence, from everlasting, "God is love." There is love ;—felt love ;—inconceivable mutual complacency ;—love in exercise, mutually interchanging and reciprocating endearments ;—there is such love implied in the very nature of God as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. In particular, from before all worlds, the Father thus, in the Spirit, loves the Son, "dwelling in his bosom." But it is love, however exercised, that is resting and not giving ; it is the repose rather than the activity of love. If it is to be manifested as a love that gives, that is active, that actu-

ally magnifies or benefits its object, it would seem that there must be creation.

Indeed it is only in creation that the Son himself can become practically the object of this love. If God, because of his love to him, has "appointed him to be heir of all things," the "all things" of which he is to be "heir" must be made ; made by him and for him. There must be "goings forth" on his part from the Father ; there must be, on the Father's part, "the bringing in of the first begotten into the world." Then, and only then, when he appears as "the beginning of the creation of God," "the first born of every creature," is the Son in a position in which he can receive gifts from the Father, or in which he can have bestowed on him the inheritance of all things. The Father's love to him may now take the form of bountifulness, liberality, lavish giving ; it may now express itself in deeds. And, overflowing from him to the creatures called into being by his hand and for his sake, —especially to those who, being made in God's image, can know his nature,—this divine love finds vent in those tender mercies which are over all his works. So, in the beginning of the creation, God in his Son loved the goodly universe of which his Son had become the head ; with a love to him and to it that could never weary of bestowing favours. So, when this earth was made,—“in whose habitable parts” the Son as “the eternal Wisdom rejoiced,”—and when this race of ours was formed, “the sons of men, with whom were his delights,”—“God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good.” His love then filled our cup of innocent and pure

happiness to the brim, if only we had been content to hold it straight.

Thus, for a season, one quality of the love which is God's nature,—which God is,—its simple bountifulness,—its being “ready to distribute, willing to communicate,”—had room to expatiate, and if I may dare to say so, to indulge and enjoy itself, in the teeming earth, and in man, its godlike proprietor and lord, for whom he bade it bring forth all its fulness.

But there is a quality of this love for which that first creation provided no outlet ; a quality more wonderful than all its bountifulness ; the quality for whose exercise the fall gave occasion. To creatures innocent and pure, God, for the love he has to his Son, by whom and for whom they are made, may give all sorts of good things,—the good things with which earth is stored,—and better things still if they will but obey his word. To guilty creatures alone can he “give his Son to be the propitiation for their sins.”

Still, however, it is now as always to the visible creation, to what he sees and whom he sees, that God's love goes forth in exercise. The objects of it are seen.

Seen ! And how seen ? Can it be said now, “God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good” ? To bless and benefit a world and a race seen by him in that light, might be almost said to be self-gratification, rather than self-sacrifice. But it comes to be self-sacrifice when its objects are seen to be corrupt and vile ; guilty and deserving only of wrath ; polluted and unclean ; with nothing to attract, but every-

thing to repel ; alike unloving and unlovely. To continue to love creatures thus seen ;—not only so, but to love them with a love that does not spare his own Son,—a love that, when law and justice demand a victim, will rather that he should be the victim than they ;—that is a manner of love implying something else and something more than bountifulness. And that is God's manner of love to those whom he now sees,—to “the world lying in wickedness.”

Now our “loving him whom we have not seen,” never could be a test of our having in us this “love which is of God.” If the thing to be proved is the identity, in kind or nature, of our love and God's love :—its being with the very same love with which he loves that we also love ;—that never can be proved by an appeal to our love to him. It must turn upon the consideration of his love to the world, and the likeness of our love to that.

Mark here only one point of difference between God's love to us and any love we may have to him ; look at the object in either case. On our part, when we love God, the object is the all-good, the all-amiable. Nay, more. It is the God who “first loved us.” When he loves us, he loves the evil, the unamiable. And he loves us with a love which does not grudge the surrender of his own beloved Son to our state and our doom, that we in his Son may become acceptable and well-pleasing in his eyes. Even if, therefore, our love to God were all that could be desired, all that could be looked for,—all that our knowledge of his glorious excellency and our experience of the riches of his grace might well be ex-

pected to call forth,—still it would not suffice for proof that our love is God's love ; that we love with the love which is of God ; that we love as he loves.

This accordingly seems to me to be the true sense and import of that statement of the apostle, often misunderstood, which, however, when rightly apprehended is very suggestive: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins." One is apt to think that there is here a disavowal or denial of our love to God altogether ; in which case the reference must be to our unconverted state. Or else it must be such a disparagement of our love to God, even in our converted state, as would represent it to be nothing, in comparison with his love to us. Both of these thoughts are no doubt true. But I am persuaded that there is a deeper meaning in the statement ; more appropriate to the context ; more to the purpose of the argument. It is assumed that we love God. And much is made of that, as we may soon see, in what follows. But it is not our loving God, however sincerely and warmly, that can prove our love to be the same with his. Were we loving him even as the angels love him, were we loving him even as the Son loves him, that would not suffice. It would still be love on our part of a very different sort from that love of his ; having a very different kind of object, and acting in a very different way. The Son himself proved his oneness with the Father, in respect of the love now in question, by his voluntarily coming to seek and to save the lost. The angels prove theirs by the "joy that

there is among them over one sinner that repenteth," and by their being "all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation."

"Herein then is love," "the love which is of God," the love whose reproduction in us is to be tested;—"not that we have loved God,"—which, thanks to his grace, we do; not by that, even though it were all that it ought to be, which, alas! it is far from being;—"but that he loved us;" that he loved us when we were yet sinners; that he saw us then, and pitied us, and "sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." That is the model, the exemplar, the pattern, of the love which is to test our being "born of God."

Two things are thus apparent. In the first place, this love in us, if it is to verify itself as being God's very love, must be love, not to the unseen, but to the seen; to a world that is seen; to men and women in it that are seen; to one another, to our brethren, to our fellow-men, as seen. And, moreover, it must be love to them, seen by us as God sees them. The objects of love must be the same to us as to God; and seen to be the same; seen in the same light; from the same point of view. "No man hath seen God at any time;" but God has always seen, and always sees, every man; he has seen, and sees you. And, seeing you such as you are, he has loved you. Do you love your brother, your neighbour; seeing him, I do not say as God sees him, but as God has seen and sees you when he loves you? There must be identity in the object of this common love, God's and yours; you and he must love the same

object ; the same person. But that is not all. He is, both to God and to you, visible ; he is seen. And as seen by God and by you he must be the same ; the same in your eyes, in your judgment, in your esteem, as he is in God's. Or, as I have hinted, it may serve the same purpose, and be more profitable, to put the matter thus : he must be seen by you as you are seen by God when he loveth you. He must be the same in your eyes, in your judgment, in your esteem, as you are in God's. That will do as well.

Who is it who is the object of your love ? One seen, of course. But is he seen by you with God's eye, or with the world's eye, or with the eye of your own natural prepossession, your own natural liking ? I am far from saying that this last kind of love is always necessarily wrong. But it is not "the love which is of God ;" which identifies you as "born of God, and knowing God." Is he to you what he is to God ? He must be either one whom God with most intense compassion pities, and yearns in his inmost bowels to save ; or one whom God welcomes and embraces, not because he is naturally amiable, but because in him the Son of his love sees of the travail of his soul and is satisfied. In either view, is he the same to you that he is to God ?

But I must press the question further. Does what you see in your fellow-men cool or quench your love to them, more than what God sees in them cools or quenches his love to them ? All that is unattractive, all that is unamiable, all that is repelling in them is seen by him as well as by you ; seen by him infinitely better than

by you. Does it affect him as it affects you? Does it hinder him from loving them, as it seems to hinder you? Still further I must press the question. Is it the same thing, or the same sort of thing, seen in them, which draws God's love to them, that commends them also to your love? What is that? Either it is the misery, be it splendid or squalid, of a doomed soul, or it is the broken heart of a child of God. These call forth the love of God; these alone; these always. Do they always call forth yours? Wherever a sinner still in his sin is seen, does your heart go forth towards him in earnest longing and striving for his salvation, as does the heart of God? When the poor prodigal returns, and is clasped in forgiving arms, is your sympathy with the loving father or with the jealous brother? Or, to bring the question home again to your personal experience, is it because you see other men as God sees you that you love them? You see them, too many of them, alas! in the same state and of the same character that were yours when God seeing you loved you; polluted, as you were polluted; perishing, as you were perishing. Do you love them on that account, as on that account God loved you, when he had pity upon you? Again, you see them, some of them, like yourselves now, by his grace, dear in God's sight as his ransomed and saved ones. Do you love them on that account, as on that account God loves you?

For, secondly, this love in us must be the same with God's love, in respect of its character, as well as in respect of its objects. It must be what we have seen that that love is, communicative and self-sacrificing. Our

love to God cannot be of that nature. We cannot impart anything of ours to him ; we cannot sacrifice anything of ours for him ; he is beyond the reach of any loving offices of that sort from us. "He is our Lord ; our goodness reacheth not to him." If our love is his love, it must be proved to be so by its going forth in active service, not to him whom we cannot see, but to those whom we do see ; God's creatures, to whom his own love goes forth ; the love manifested in creation's bounties, the love manifested in redemption's grace,—in his "sending his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

And here, in point of fact, is the real practical test. Love, when its exclusive object is unseen, is sometimes apt to become ideal, shadowy, and merely sentimental. Even when God himself is, or is imagined to be, its object, it has not unfrequently taken that form and aspect. Meditative musing on the nature of God, the rapt gaze of solitary contemplation, the fixed eye of secluded devotion, filling itself with great thoughts of the divine majesty, excellency, and beauty, has had the effect of begetting in the soul a certain mingled emotion of solemn awe and melting tenderness, which is apt to pass for divine love. It is akin to the feeling which the hero or the victim of an affecting tale may call forth ; though deeper far and more intense. In real life, in church history, this kinship has been but too terribly exemplified. Love to God has been spiritualised and sublimated, as it were, into a passion ; such a passion as may, and must, end in one of two ways ; either in a

sort of mystical and rapturous absorption of the human in the divine, or in a still more dangerous substitution of the human for the divine.

But, short of that extreme, there are tendencies against which sensitive natures, of an emotional and impulsive character, must be on their guard. There is the tendency to put imagination in the room of reality. For instance, it is far easier to smile or weep over a narrative that must consist of the sayings and doings of unseen, because imaginary, actors and sufferers, than to go out among the real parties in life's drama, and meet in close contact their actual cases. Hence the meaning, in another view of it, of this solemn intimation, brought in at this stage, and in this connection: "No man hath seen God at any time." There is, there can be, no safe way of proving that we are born of God and know God, except our loving what is seen. No love to the unseen can suffice; nay, love to the unseen alone may almost be made too much of; it may become deceptive and delusive, or unwholesome and unsafe. Our love, if it is to be God's very love in us, must be love like his, to what is seen by both alike; to real, actual, living men, seen by us as by him. In that channel, our love to the unseen may always safely run. For—

II. In this human love, in our thus loving one another, the divine love has its consummation or perfection. "If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us."

It is a very solemn position which we are thus called to occupy. "In us God's love is to be perfected."

We are to be the means of its being perfected; the instruments and agents in effecting that result. Not only so. In us it takes end; in us it is finished. Nothing beyond us remains; no chance, no opportunity, of any manifestation of God's love, that can be at all available for the world lying in wickedness. That love has reached us, and it should, through us, reach the whole world. If not, it cannot otherwise avail. "His love is perfected in us."

There is indeed another sense in which these words may be understood. They may mean that God's love, —the love which is of God,—the love which is his very nature,—reproduces itself in us perfectly, only when, with his own very love, we love one another. That is true. But the inspired meaning here is, I think, somewhat deeper. It seems to indicate that our love to one another, if it is indeed of the same sort with his love to us, the love manifested in his sending his Son to save us, is really on his part the last act, the crowning or final exercise, of his love. It is as if he told us that his love was exhausted in begetting or reproducing itself in us. And it may well be so. No higher instance of love is possible than his sending his Son; no stronger sort of love can be imagined. And if that very love passes from him to us; having the same objects and cherishing towards them the same affection; if we love one another as God loves us; is not his love perfected in us? What more can be done to let it have "its perfect work"?

Ah, then, what responsibility is ours! What an office or duty is laid upon us! To perfect, to complete,

the manifestation of God's love for the saving of the world ! Through us, his love,—the very love manifested in his sending his Son to be the propitiation for our sins,—is to pass on to our fellow-men. We are, as it were, in his stead. Nay, he is himself in us. He who is love dwelleth in us ; he who dwelleth in us is love. It is not so much we who love, as God who loveth in us. It is his own very love that has now in us its full expression, if we love as he is love. It is ours to see to it that it is and shall be so.

The subject is not ended ; but I pause, and offer some practical inferences that may well be pondered.

1. Very plainly the love to one another here enjoined is of such a sort that none but a child of God can be capable of it, or can feel it. None other, in fact, can comprehend what it is. We must first be ourselves the receivers of it, before we can be the dispensers or transmitters of it ; before it can have its perfect work in us towards others. We must be taught by the Spirit to know what we are, as seen by God, when we are the objects of his love ; what we are, in his sight, when he loves us with a saving love. We must be made by the Spirit experimentally to feel what manner of love it is that, instead of being repelled, is attracted, by our unloveliness ; that instead of smiting us, lays the stroke on his own beloved Son ; that now, in him, lavishes on us all saving benefits and blessings. This then clearly is our first concern ; to see to it that this love of God is really ours ; embraced by us ; apprehended and appropriated by us ; enjoyed by us richly.

2. This love which is of God, when perfected in us, must contemplate its objects in the same light in which they are seen by God. It is comparatively easy to love the loveable,—to love them that love us. If we look only at men's amiable qualities, if we surround ourselves with a circle of friends,—all decent, worthy, and upright,—if, shutting our eyes to what they are before him who searches the heart, and judging according to the outward appearance, we perceive only what is fair and charming in their winning ways; if, in a word, keeping out of view their spiritual state and character, we dwell exclusively on their natural gifts and graces;—if it is thus that we love them, our love is not God's love perfected in us. For to be God's love perfected in us, our love must see its objects as God's love sees its objects. What we see in them of guilt and sin, of enmity against God and insubordination to his law, must be offensive to us as it is to him. Men estranged from God, whatever may be their other excellences, must be to us what they are to God. Then, and only then, can we test the identity of our love with God's love. Then, and only then, can we have some idea of what it is to love those whom God loves, with his own very love; his love, not of indifference to evil or complacency in evil, but of deep compassion to the evil-doer and earnest longing that he may be saved.

Hence the Lord says, "Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you." In that way, and only in

that way, can we prove ourselves, by our family likeness, to be the children of our heavenly Father. So are we perfect, in this way of loving; according to the command: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

For it is not absolute or general perfection that is here meant; perfection in the wide and universal sense of that term. The command, so understood, would be irrelevant as well as impracticable. It is perfection or completeness,—thorough simplicity and uprightness,—as regards the particular grace referred to; according to a use of the word very common in the Old Testament Scriptures. The perfection indicated is the perfection of honesty or righteousness in loving our "seen," as God loves his "seen;" loving our enemies with the very love with which our Heavenly Father loved us when we were his.

XXXIII.

LOVE THE MEANS OF MUTUAL INDWELLING ; GOD
IN US AND WE IN GOD.

“ Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love ; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.”—1 JOHN iv. 13-16.

THE statement, “ Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit,” carries us back to a previous statement (iii. 24), “ Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.” We are thus reminded of the scope and design of the whole passage. The question is about the mutual indwelling of God in us and of us in God ; and more particularly about his abiding in us. How are we to know this ? By the Spirit which he hath given us, is the answer. But that raises another question. Every spirit is not to be believed ; there must be a trial of the spirits. By what test or tests are they to be tried ? How is the Spirit that is of God to be distinguished from the spirit of antichrist ? First, by his confessing in us that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh (ver. 2-6) ; and secondly, by our loving with the love which is of God

(ver. 7-12). And now, connecting the two, John brings us back substantially to the original statement, as to our knowing that we dwell in God, and God in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. For the two tests are now brought closely together, and shown to be not so much two as one ;—or at least not two independent tests, each separately valid in itself, but so intimately related to one another that they mutually involve one another, and thus combine together to make up one cogent and irrefragable proof. It is this virtual unity of the two tests that forms the theme or subject of the verses now before us.

I. The first of the two tests is recapitulated : “ We have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world ; whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God ” (ver. 14, 15). There is a slight difference here from the language of the second verse ; and the difference is evidently designed. It is intended to impregnate, if I may so speak, and vivify the truth confessed, with the love whose origin and nature John has been unfolding. The two ideas,—his being “ sent ” to be “ the Saviour of the world,” and “ his being the Son,”—are evidently suggested by what has been said of that divine love in the intermediate verses (ver. 9, 10).

It is interesting, in this view, to trace the growth and development of the thought. The confession which is to be the sign of its being the Spirit that is of God, or the Spirit of truth, that we receive, is first put as if it were the mere acknowledgment of a bare historical

fact. It is much more by implication ; but, so far as the actual expression goes, it is not anything more. But see to what fulness of warm gushing life it has now attained. And how ? It has been passing through an atmosphere of love, and has thus got to be impressed with a certain teeming warmth and quickening power. What is to be confessed, when we first look at it and lay it aside, might seem to be, so far as the mere wording of it is concerned, scarcely more significant and affecting than the notice of a birth, or any other common fact, of which we read in old annals, or in the current news of the day. Now, when we take it up to look at it again, after it has been steeped in the rich dew of heaven's love, it glows and is instinct with meaning. "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh ;" come to be "the Saviour of the world ;" come as "the Son, whom the Father hath sent ;"—that is the full confession now.

Hence the real reason of that first test, and of its being so closely interwoven with the other. How should the confession of a mere matter of fact be so certain a token of God's "giving us of his Spirit," and of his "dwelling in us ?" For it is a simple matter of fact, to be known and ascertained like other ordinary facts in history ; to be received on the very same ground and warrant of historical evidence and testimony. The apostle admits as much, both before (i. 1-3) and now (iv. 14). You have our testimony for it ; and our testimony may be relied on ;—"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you ;"—"We have seen and do testify" what we ask you to confess. The question therefore

recurs : How should my confessing a mere and simple matter of fact,—especially considering that, however wonderful it may be, I have it attested to me by sufficient evidence, prove that “God giveth me of his Spirit,” and so “dwelleth in me?”

The answer must be found in the character of the fact or truth confessed ; or in the aspect in which it is presented, or presents itself to me. What is it in itself ? What is it to me ? If it is a fact or truth of a merely historical sort, and is so apprehended by me, my admission and avowal of it will be no proof or presumption of God's having “given me of his Spirit, and dwelling in me,”—any more than my admission and avowal of any well-attested event that ever happened in the world. That may be my case ; if so, it is a sad one. It may be to me a mere fact or truth of history ; not only in its original form, naked and bald, “Jesus Christ is come in the flesh ;” but even in the more warm and living substance which it takes, when it is, as it were, clothed upon with the love which is from heaven. For whatever can be stated in words about that love, and the measure and the manifestation of it, can all be comprehended by the natural understanding. I can put it all in propositions intelligible enough to myself and others ; and I can honestly accept these propositions, and confess my acceptance of them. But it may be head-work and not heart-work with me after all. So long as it is so, it is my work merely ; the work of my own mind, not of the Spirit. For his work is mainly in the heart. It is spirit dealing with spirit ; not mere intellect deal-

ing with intellect. It is God's Spirit dealing intimately and lovingly with my spirit, and that too upon a special theme ; a specific subject ; " Jesus Christ come in the flesh," as " the very Son of God, sent by the Father to be the Saviour of the world."

Now if God thus communes with me, his Spirit with my spirit ;—not mind with mind merely, but heart with heart ;—upon this special theme or subject ; if the fact of " Jesus Christ having come in the flesh" thus starts from the page of history, and fixes and rivets itself in my inner man, becoming part and parcel of my most inward experience ; if, in short, the truth comes home to me, as not simply a historical event, but, as it were, a honey-filled bee, full fraught with all the love that is in the Father's heart of hearts and is poured out in the saving mission of his Son ;—if I take this in, and let this heaven-laden bee pierce me, and fill the wound it makes with what itself is full of ;—love, this love of God ;—then I have something to confess, which may well be an evidence of " God's having given me of his Spirit, and so dwelling in me." Yes ! I may humbly appropriate the Lord's words to Peter ; " Blessed art thou, Simoa Barjona ; for flesh and blood has not revealed this to thee, but my Father which is in heaven."

II. The second test is thus in large measure anticipated, and all but swallowed up, in the first. The confession of truth is now seen to be identical with the sense and experience of love : " We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love ; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God

in him" (ver. 16.) "We have known and believed." This is quite John's manner; to unite in one knowledge and faith; we have intelligently believed; we have believingly understood. We have thus known and believed "the love that God hath to us;"—or rather, "the love which God hath in us."* For the expression is very peculiar and emphatical; and, as used here, can scarcely mean anything else than that his love to us has become his love in us; and that we have known and believed it as such. Of course it is his love to us; but it is his love to us, transferred, as it were, or transplanted, from the gospel, where it is a matter of revelation from without, to our own hearts, where it becomes a moving principle and power from within. There, in the gospel, it is his love manifested to us; here, in our hearts, it is his love actually existing in us;—not merely felt by us as his love to us; but felt by us as his love in us;—in us, so truly and literally in us, that we become the conscious storekeepers or depositories of it, as it were, and the dispensers of it to others who are as much its objects as we are ourselves. The love of God, having us for its objects, passes from God's

* This is the literal rendering in the verse before us (16), as it is also in a previous verse (9). There perhaps it can be more easily explained than here as meaning merely God's love to us; though even there more may be implied. In both verses an indefinite mode of rendering the phrase may be adopted—"his love in regard to us," or "with respect to us." But that is not satisfactory in either case; certainly not in that now in question. What we are said to have known and believed is God's love; his manner of loving. And we know and believe it as having it, in some real sense, in us.

outer record into our inner life. It enters into us ; it finds access to the innermost recesses of our moral and spiritual being ; it is therefore now "the love which God has in us." He pours into us, he puts and plants in us, his own love. He has it in us ; his own very love ; reproduced by himself in us ; communicated, if one may dare to say so, by himself, from his own heart to ours. It is the love of which we ourselves, in the first instance, are the objects ; of which it was our first relief and joy, when we were convinced of sin, to find ourselves the objects. It is the love of which, when all but despairing, we laid trembling hold, and of which we are still fain to lay hold continually ;—not love to the holy, the pure, the penitent, the believing, the chosen ; but love to the world as such, of which we are part ; love to men as sinners, "of whom I am chief." But that love is in us now. "God has it in us." It is not merely that we have it in us, as a ground of confidence for ourselves ; God has it in us as on his behalf a treasury of love available for others. It is in us,—not merely as what we ourselves grasp and count to be all our salvation, but as what springs up in us, and is outgoing towards others ; being thus God's own very love, dwelling and working in our whole inner man. That, I am persuaded, and nothing short of that, is the great thought involved in these wondrous words, "we have known and believed the love that God hath in us." Not only have we known and believed his love, so as to apprehend and appropriate it, as it comes from without and from above ;—not only so as to take it and make it

available for our own spiritual life and comfort ; but also, and especially, so as to imbibe it ;—to drink it into the very essence of our renovated nature, our renewed selves. In us who know it and believe it, God has his own love in actual existence and in active exercise.

Herein lies that community of nature between God and us which the Spirit works or effects. Love is God's nature ; "God is love" (ver. 16). Again that great truth is here proclaimed. And, as it would seem, it is now proclaimed again for the purpose of bringing out what it is of God that we can share with him ; that he can "have in us." Much there is about God that must continue always altogether incommunicable to us ; much that must remain for ever outward and objective to us, and never can become inward and subjective in us. All that pertains to him as lawgiver, ruler, judge,—all that he is as, seated on the throne of his high majesty and universal empire, he carries on the government of the universe,—is and must be exclusively his own ; it is only in a very secondary sense, and in a very subordinate capacity, that we can have any of his authority delegated to us when, besides dealing with us as his subjects, he uses us as his ministers. But it would seem to be otherwise with his holiness and his love. Paul speaks of our being made "partakers of his holiness ;"—John speaks of "the love he has in us." The two indeed are one, for his holiness is loving and his love is holy. His holy love therefore is not incommunicable ; it passes from him to us. Not only are

we its objects ; more than that ; it begets itself anew, if one may say so, in us. It is God's very love, his holy love, in us, and it is to be known and believed,—to be felt and manifested,—by us accordingly.

What is this but our “dwelling in love” (ver. 16)—in God's own love? Love ; the holy love of God ; of the Father sending the Son to be the Saviour of the world ; is now the habitual home of our hearts. We remain ; we abide ; we stay in it. We would not quit it, or let it go ; we cannot, for it alone is our peace. Away from that love ; that holy love ; that love with all its holiness ; reaching us and saving us, the most worldly of the world, the very chief of sinners ; what hope, what health, can we have? Neither can we quit it, or let it go, as a principle of life and activity, going out from ourselves to others. If it is to be God's love to us, known and believed by us, for our own peace and comfort and holy spiritual quickening ; it must be God's love in us, his own love, which “he has in us,” known and believed by us for outward use, as well as for inward assurance and rest. Only in so far as we constantly realise this love of God, both as the love he has to us and as the love he has in us, do we really dwell in love. But dwelling thus in this love, we do indeed dwell in God. For God is this love ; and as such he dwelleth in us. In respect of this love, of which we are now both the grateful receivers and the glad transmitters, there is a blessed oneness between God and us. He dwells in this love ; for he is love ; and we now dwell in this love also. It becomes our

nature, as it is his, thus to love. Therefore this love is the bond of union between him and us ;—the meeting-place, the habitation, the home, in which we dwell together ; he in us and we in him. This love, this holy love, is that which God and we may have in common. And therefore it is the element or quality in respect of which there may be mutual indwelling of us in God and of God in us.

Hence the two tests of God's "giving us of his Spirit and dwelling in us," coalesce, as it were, and become essentially one. To confess, on the testimony of the apostles as eyewitnesses, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world (ver. 14); that Jesus is the Son of God (ver. 15); and to know and believe the love that God has to us and in us (ver. 16); is really one and the same thing. For the confession is not the cold assent of the understanding to a formal article in a creed. It is the warm and cordial embracing of the Father's love, incarnate in the Son whom he sends to be the Saviour of the world. It is the letting into our hearts of the love which is God's nature; for God is love. It is our dwelling with him in love. For, as Paul teaches, in entire and perfect harmony with John;—"In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision availeth anything, but faith which worketh by love;" faith confessing Christ; faith knowing and believing the love that God has in us; faith loving as it sees and feels that God himself loves.

XXXIV.

THE BOLDNESS OF PERFECTED LOVE.

“Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment : because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love ; but perfect love casteth out fear : because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love [him], because he first loved us.—1 JOHN iv. 17-19.

THE leading idea here is “boldness in the day of judgment ;” not boldness prospectively when the day comes, but present boldness in the view of it now. It is much the same thing as we have in a previous section of the epistle (iii. 19-21), “our assuring our hearts before God ;” “our having confidence toward God.” This boldness is connected with the perfecting of love ; “Herein is our love made perfect ;” or as in the margin, “Herein is love with us made perfect,* that we may have boldness in the day of judgment.” Love then, or the love be-

* The exact literal rendering is, “Herein is perfected the love with us.” In the twelfth verse, the expression is different, “His love is perfected in us.” There, I think, it must be the perfection or completeness of his love to us, as realised by us in our consciousness and experience, that is meant. In that verse (12) the participle is used : “His love is in us as a perfected thing, a consummated fact.” Here (ver. 17) it is the verb that is used, and so used as to denote a work or process brought to a full or final issue ; the perfecting of the love with us, as a treaty or transaction of some sort.

The textual rendering, indeed, of the 17th verse : “Herein is our love made perfect,” is apt to mislead in another way, by suggesting the

fore indicated is perfected with us ; and the perfecting of this love with us is bound up with our having boldness in the day of judgment. The bond or connecting link is our oneness with Christ ; our "being in this world" as he is now.

What is perfected is love ; not love indefinitely ; but the love which is God's nature, and which comes out in the saving gift of his Son. It is to be perfected as "love with us." It is not merely, as in the twelfth verse, to be perfected in us, as love to us ; it is to be perfected in us, as "love with us." It is God's love so shared by him with us as to constitute a love relationship, or love-fellowship, between him and us. This is indispensable to our having boldness in the prospect of

idea that we have here the counterpart of the statement in the 12th verse : "This love is perfected in us." There it is God's love that is said to be perfected, his love to us ; here we are apt to suppose that it is our love that is made perfect, our love to God. But the subject of our love to God has not yet come up for consideration ; it does not really come up till the 20th verse. For, by consent of the best critics, the pronoun "him" is to be omitted in the 19th verse, as not having been in the original ; so that the assertion is there quite general : "We love, because he first loved us." How much better this suits the scope of the apostle's reasoning, my exposition of the verse may partly show. Again, if we adopt the textual rendering of the 17th verse : "Herein is our love made perfect," we miss the emphatic article "the," or "this ;" "the love," or "this love ;" referring to a love previously spoken of. And "our love" is an awkward and unwarrantable substitute for "love with us," or "the love with us,"—"this love with us." On every ground the marginal translation is to be preferred, or the still more literal one which I have suggested above : "Herein is perfected this love with us." And let it be borne in mind, as I have stated, that the preposition is not the same in the two verses, the 12th and the 17th. In the 12th it is *ἐν ἡμῶν* ; in the 17th *μεθ' ἡμῶν*.

the day of judgment. And it is realised through oneness with Christ, through our "being as he is;" not as he was before he came into the world;—nor merely as he was in the world;—but as he is now. It is our "being as he is," that connects in us, in our consciousness and experience, the perfecting of God's love with us, and our having boldness to face the final account (ver. 17).

The boldness must be very complete; for it must exclude whatever is incompatible with the ground on which it rests. Now, it rests on love; on God's love shared with us. But love shared between the lover and the loved, in a mutual fellowship of love, excludes or "casts out fear." It must do so, for "fear hath torment." A relationship or fellowship based on fear is of course quite conceivable; but it has torment. It cannot, therefore consist with a relationship or fellowship of love. "He that feareth is not made perfect in love;" in this love; the love, or covenant of love, here spoken of or referred to (ver. 18). But "we love." We may not be made perfect in love,—the love or loving treaty in question. But we do love; and our love is a reality; it may be relied on as a reality; for it is love springing out of his love to us; it is his own very love in us. "We love, because he first loved us."

Having offered these exegetical explanations, I now take up the topics suggested in their order.

I. (ver. 17.) "Herein is our love"—God's love with us—"made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world."

The perfecting of "God's love with us," so that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, depends on our being as Christ is,—and that too "in this world." We are in this world, not as he was when he was in it, but as he is now.

In a very eminent and emphatic sense, God's love with him is now made perfect ; in a sense in which that could not be said of him as he was when in this world. The Father's covenant of love with him, as "Jesus Christ come in the flesh"—"the Son sent by him to be the propitiation for our sins"—is now perfectly ratified, so that he may have boldness in the view of any day of judgment.

That, I repeat, could scarcely be said of him as he was when in this world. Personally, no doubt, he was then the object of the Father's love ; and that divine love, as communicated and shared with him, in his human nature and earthly condition, was absolutely perfect. Personally, therefore, he might have boldness,—he had nothing to fear,—in any judicial reckoning. But consider him as "sent to be the propitiation for our sins."

Oh, what a cloud comes in between him and his Father's love ! What a cloud,—charged with fiery wrath, about to burst on his devoted head ! And what trembling is there in the prospect of that judicial reckoning with him for our transgression of the law which he has to stand ! It was not then altogether a fellowship of love with him on the part of God. The things that passed between God and him, as he hung on the accursed tree, were not all love-tokens and love-

caresses ! Love was with him still, divine love, even then and there ; love, if possible, more than ever, for the very death he was dying, in fulfilment of the divine purpose of salvation. But something else was with him too ; something that for a season terribly shaded that love. Divine justice was with him ; justice inexorably demanding, in the interests of law and government, the stern execution of the penal sentence. And that must first be perfected ; that must have its perfect work ; before the love can be made perfect. He feels, he affects, no boldness in meeting that day of judgment. He knows its terror ; he shrinks ; he cries ; he "is crucified through weakness." For us to be as he then was, would give us little boldness in view of the day of judgment awaiting us.

But to be as he is now ! Ah, that is a very different matter ! Now that his dark agony is over, and all his groans are past ; now that there is no more present with him, on the part of God, any wrath at all, but only perfect love ; now that, no longer bearing condemnation, but accepted for his righteousness' sake, he has boldness to set any day of judgment at defiance ; now that the Father need have no other dealings with him any more for ever but only dealings of perfect love ; now that, being raised from the dead, he dieth no more ; death, judicial death, having no more dominion over him ! May this privilege indeed be ours ? Nay, it is ; "we are as he is." When and where ? Now, "in this world." It is not the blessedness of the future state ; it is blessedness to be got here and now. Do you ask

how? Look to Jesus ; to “ Jesus Christ come in the flesh ; ” “ the Son sent by the Father to be the propitiation for your sins.” How was it possible for him, when he took that position, to be as he now is ? On one only condition. He must consent first to be as you are, in the full sense and to the full extent of enduring and exhausting all the pains and penalties which your being as you are entails on you. Not otherwise could he come to be as he is now. And not otherwise can you come to be as he is now ; not otherwise than by first consenting to be as he was then ; to die as he died ; to be “ crucified with him.” Is this a hard preliminary ? Nay, it is altogether reasonable as well as necessary ; it is eminently gracious. It is his own free gift of himself to you ; of himself as the propitiation for your sins.

I take your death as mine, he cries ; the death which as sinners you deserve to die. I die that death in your stead. You cannot die that death yourselves and ever live again. But I can. “ I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore.” How much better is it for you to make my death yours than to die eternally yourselves !

Can you refuse to be as he then was, in the exercise of realising, appropriating, uniting faith ; “ knowing the fellowship of his sufferings ? ”—especially when you consider how this not only secures your never again being, as you naturally are, under condemnation ; but secures also your being as he now is. God’s love is with you ; as truly “ perfected with you,” as it is with him. You may have the same boldness that he might have in

facing any day of judgment. To you, as to him, death as the wages of sin is really past. There is no more any judicial reckoning with you on God's part,—no more with you than with him ; but only dealings of love,—of love made perfect,—love having free course,—love unfettered and unrestrained. So you have boldness as regards the day of judgment.

II. This love with us, thus perfected, is inconsistent with fear. It founds or establishes a love-relationship, a love-fellowship, with which fear cannot co-exist :—“ There is no fear in love ; but perfect love casteth out fear : because fear hath torment ; he that feareth is not made perfect in love.”

The love here meant is not our love to God ; neither is it, strictly speaking, God's love to us, or our apprehension of it. In a sense, it may be said to be the mutual love that subsists between God and us, when, “ as Christ is, so are we, in this world.” Or, still more exactly, it may be understood as denoting the terms of loving agreement,—of good understanding and endearment,—on which God would have us to be with him, in virtue of “ his love with us being made perfect.” The great practical truth taught is that our faith, when we “ confess that Jesus is the Son of God” (ver. 15), and when “ we have known and believed the love that God hath to us” (ver. 16), brings us into a position, as regards God, in which there is not only no occasion, but no room, for fear.

Love and fear are diametrically opposite principles ; and they imply opposite modes of treatment on the part

of God towards us, and opposite relations on our part towards him. If God deals with us in the way of strict law and righteous judgment, then the footing on which we are with him is one simply of fear. His fear is with us ; not his love. And it is so with us that, however it may be lulled for a time, it will one day be perfected, or have its perfect work, in "a fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversary." If, again, God deals with us in the way of rich and free grace, then the footing on which we are with him is one of love. He no longer holds over us the threat of punishment ; the fear of it is not with us any more. It cannot be, for this fear hath torment.

Mark the reason here assigned for fear being cast out ; it hath torment ; the torment of anticipated judgment ; for that is exactly what is meant. It echoes the voice of the demons :—"Art thou come to torment us before the time ?" But we with whom "God's love is perfected," have boldness in reference to the day of judgment ; not torment, but boldness. Therefore "there is no fear in that love," thus perfected ; for fear introduces an element the reverse of what a state of loving fellowship implies. Hence "he that feareth is not made perfect in that love ;" he does not fully realise the standing or position which it gives him ; he does not enter completely into the faith and fellowship of "God's love with us," as a love that "is made perfect."

Here let us consider, first, the evil and danger of confounding these two opposite footings, of fear and of love, on which we may be with God ; and, secondly,

the careful provision which God has made for keeping them separate.

1. I take the case of one who is still in the relation to God in which fear reigns ; who yet, at the same time, assumes that, even in his case, there may be something of the opposite relation, of which love is the exponent and expression. He is still under wrath ; he has no real boldness as regards the day of judgment ; he is subject to the power of the fear which has torment. But he has a notion that God's love may yet somehow be with him after all ; he has a dream of mercy ; he welcomes the idea of indulgence and impunity ; it abates his torment. It does not really bring him into the region of love, but it mitigates fear. Is that a good thing for him ? Were it not better far that he should be left, naked and shelterless, to the full experience of all the torment which fear has ? He might thus be shut up to try "a more excellent way."

But I take, with John, the opposite case. I suppose that you are within the realm and domain of love. Love ; the love which is God's very nature ; the love "manifested in his sending his only begotten Son into the world that you might live through him ;" that love is the atmosphere of the region in which now you dwell. You are on loving terms with God ; his love being with you ; and being "made perfect with you." Nay ; not quite made perfect. It should be so, but it is not so. For you let into your heart something of what is proper to the opposite relation ; your being on the old terms with God to which fear belongs. And the practical effect of

this is very disastrous. Not to dwell upon its sure tendency to mar your peace and joy,—it thoroughly cramps your free walk with God in light ; it has a sad bearing on your manner of serving God. For no two things can be more opposite than service rendered on the footing of love, and service rendered on the footing of fear. Not only are the motives different ; the kinds of service which they prompt are different. If I am under the influence of the fear which has torment, and so far as I am under its influence, I am inevitably inclined to evasion and compromise. I must do some things and leave some things undone ; my conscience, moved by fear, will not otherwise let me alone. But I sail as near the wind as possible, if only I may keep barely on the safe side of the law. I venture on occasional omissions of duty and compliances with temptation ; stealthily, as it were, “snatching a trembling joy.” The service is all task-work, slave-work. As such I grudge it always, and get off from it when I can on any plea. That is my way with God under the torment of fear. It should be otherwise when I move in the sphere, and breathe the air, of love ; of divine love ; “God’s love with me made perfect.” There should be no guile in my spirit now ; no inclination to unfair dealing any more. Alas ! is it so ? Is it always so with me ? Even if I have some sense and experience of the new and better footing of love on which it is my privilege to be with my God, am I not too often visited with questionings and misgivings proper only to the old footing of fear ? Do I not find myself ever and

anon, asking, Must I positively renounce this?—may I not, for once, venture upon that? And does not all such asking indicate something of the old servile mind? What uneasiness is there in such a way of living with God, and what unfaithfulness too! What “unsteadfastness and perfidiousness in his covenant” of love! Surely it is true that he who in any measure thus acts from mere fear, under the pressure of felt necessity, is not “made perfect in love.”

2. But why should it be so? God would not have it so. His will is that there should be a sharp line of separation between the two incompatible relations; that of love and that of fear. He would shut you up, completely and exclusively, into one or other of them.

Are you in that relation to which fear is appropriate? Then let it be fear alone; fear in the view of the judgment-day. By all means let fear operate alone; unmitigated, unrelieved, by any vague notion of mercy; any dream of love. That is the way in which it should operate. So operating, let it deter you from crime; let it impel you to duty. Or, better far, let it drive you to despair; to despair of yourselves; not, God forbid, of him! You have nothing to do with love as you are, and continuing as you are;—you have to do only with fear. O that it were, in the first instance, perfect fear!—fear, pure and simple, casting out, I say not love, but the idle imagination of love! Yes; it is yours to fear; and only to fear! Would to God that your fear had torment enough, not merely to set you on doing some things and avoiding some things, to soothe it or set it to sleep; but to set

you on crying, with the deep voice of true conviction: "Who shall deliver me?" "What must I do to be saved?"

Are you, on the other hand, in the relation of which love, divine love, is the characteristic? Is it not a relation of love in which full provision is made, if you will only realise it, for the entire and absolute casting out of all fear? I call upon you so to realise it. Have you, in very truth, "known and believed the love that God hath in you"? Have you considered this love, its nature, its manifestation, its effect and issue? Have you asked yourself, O my brother! this simple, but very serious, question: On what footing does this loving God; this God whose very nature is love, and whose love is with me and in me; mine in actual possession; mine in all its fulness;—on what footing does he intend and wish me to be with him? Ah! is it a footing that will still admit of the miserable suspicions and subterfuges of one driven by a tormenting dread of the lash? Is it not rather a footing that precludes them all? Not a vestige of the old state of liability to judgment remains, if "as Christ is, so you now are in this world." Not a vestige of the old grudging and guileful frame of mind, congenial to that state, should remain. Not for your own comfort merely, but for your single-eyed, and simple-minded, and honest-hearted walking with God, and serving of God,—I beseech you to let his perfect love cast out your slavish fear. For fear hath torment; it is torture; and your God and Father is not a torturing inquisitor.

III. That it may be so; that "this love with you" may be so "perfected" as to "cast out fear;" see that you love with a love that springs out of God's love, and is of the same sort. "We love," says the apostle, on behalf of himself and you who believe through his word; passing now from God's love to ours; "we love, because he first loved us."*

"We love." We can take home to ourselves personally and individually what has been said abstractly of love casting out fear. For we love, and do not fear. "He that feareth is not made perfect in love;" he does not perfectly realise the love relationship, the love-fellowship, the love-state, as it were, which God's "love with us made perfect," involves. But that is not our case; "we love."

"We love." It is the first time John has ventured to say so in this passage. Here first he brings in expressly our subjective experience or consciousness, as bearing upon the assured footing of love on which we are to be with God. Hitherto, it has all turned on God's love; manifested by him; known and believed by us; communicated to us; present with us; and as present with us, made perfect; so perfect as to cast out fear. Now, it is our love that is asserted;—"We love." For this must be the issue. It is idle to imagine that anything of the loving relationship and fellowship of which John speaks can be ours, unless we can say with him, humbly, but with some measure of confidence; "We love." And it is no light thing to say so. It is significant of much.

"We love." It is not merely that we have a natural

* See note at the beginning of this discourse, page 145..

faculty of loving, and exercise it by letting it go forth on things and persons naturally attractive to us. But we have now a divine faculty of loving; we love with the love which is of God; which is God's very nature. We love with a love that goes forth towards things and persons, as they are attractive, not to us, but to him. In particular, as regards our life with God, our walk with God, our fellowship with God, our service of God, our obedience to God; as regards all that pertains to the relation that is to subsist between him and us; "we love." Not fear, but love, is now, on our part as well as on his part, the ruling principle and living spirit of it all.

"We love." And in loving, we do but reciprocate God's love; and respond to it. "We love, because he first loved us." For our love would be but a poor and sorry thing unless it were linked on to God's love, as the consequence, or as it were the continuation of it,—the reflection or reproduction of it. Always, it must be ultimately, in the last resort, God's love on which we fall back. "God first loved us." This wondrous economy of love, in virtue of which he would have us to be on such a loving footing with him as to have fear utterly cast out, originates in him, and is all his own. If we love at all with the love which is of God, it is only because "we have known and believed the love which he hath to us." For it is "faith alone that worketh by love;"—to that principle we are brought back. If we are to realise, in our experience, the relationship and fellowship of love, as one in which there is no fear, it must be by faith. Therefore I call on you to believe;

to believe always; to believe more and more. Believe in God as first loving you;—yes, I say, as first loving you. Be very sure that that must be first; not your loving; but God's loving you. You cannot really know what love is until you believe in God as first loving you. You must first lay open your whole hearts to the free, frank acceptance of the love with which he first loveth you,—as the plant opens its bosom to the rain and sunshine of heaven. Then, from that love with which God first loveth you,—known, believed, accepted, embraced,—there will spring up love in you; such love as will make your whole intercourse with God an intercourse altogether loving, and not fearful at all; such love as will cordially welcome the assurance that God means you to be to him,—not trembling, disaffected slaves,—but loving, loyal, and confiding sons.

I close with two practical observations.

1. There is surely much here, in this glorious description of the fellowship of love which God desires to have with us, and desires us to have with him, that should encourage earnest though anxious souls. I can conceive indeed that some may be inclined to question this. They may feel as if the view now given of the position which God would have them to occupy places it beyond their reach; high above their utmost aspirations. It may seem to them a perfection quite unattainable; an ideal that they can never dream of realising. If something far short of it,—some far more ordinary and commonplace walk and service,—will not suffice or

be accepted, it is all over, they may be saying, with them. But let me ask,—In what spirit are you saying so? Is it with regret? Is it with a feeling of disappointment? Would you be upon this footing with God if you could? I must assume that you would; that you see it to be above all things desirable; that you really long and pray to be to God all that you now perceive he would have you to be. Then, if so, I beseech you to remember that this whole business of the adjustment of your relation to God as one of perfect love, is his and not yours. It is not you that have to go to him; he comes to you. It is not you who have to get up, by a painful process of inward working, love in yourselves; it is he who “first loveth you.” It is with his love you have to do, and not with your own. And his love is not far to seek,—or long to wait for. It is with you; embodied, enshrined, impersonated, in the Son of his love, sent by him to be the propitiation for your sin. Look to him; believe on him; consent to be now, in this world, as he is. And remember that “the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead). But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”

2. Let sinners be warned against presumptuous confidence with reference to the day of judgment. Whatever may be our boldness, if "as he is, so are we in this world," it does not spring from any questioning of the certainty, or any abating of the alarm, of that great and dreadful day. On the contrary, we have reached that boldness in a way that gives us an insight we never can forget into the reality and intensity of the pains of hell. "We know the terror of the Lord;" we know it by our "being crucified with Christ." What we see of it in the cross,—in Jesus hanging there,—bearing guilt,—bearing wrath;—what we feel of it in ourselves, when we take his death of condemnation as ours;—deepens our sense of God's love in saving us from it,—and fills us evermore with sensitive apprehension at the very thought of our being again "castaways." And knowing thus this terror of the Lord, we would fain "persuade men." Snatched ourselves as brands from the burning,—going softly all our days in the remembrance of our narrow escape, our most seasonable deliverance,—we cannot contemplate unmoved their going down into the pit. We beseech them to lay no flattering unction to their souls, as if judgment were not both absolutely certain and inconceivably terrible. We bid them fix their eyes on Jesus suffering judicially on the accursed tree, and hear his voice:—"If these things be done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?"

"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." For "it is

a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Who shall be able to "stand before the face of him that sitteth on the throne," and brave "the wrath of the Lamb, when the great day of his wrath is come?" "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

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seen; otherwise it would not be our loving with God's very love to us; it would not be our loving because God first loved us.

I. "We love, because he first loved us." Whom do we thus love? "Him who first loved us," we say. And we say well. But let us beware. Our saying so may be deceptive; in saying it we may lie; not perhaps deliberately, but deceiving ourselves. There is less risk when the question is made to turn upon loving our brother; for we cannot so readily say falsely or mistakenly that we love the visible, as we can say falsely or mistakenly that we love the invisible. Hence the reasonableness of this test: "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (iv. 20).

But it may be asked: Wherein precisely consists the impossibility? Is it merely that it is easier and more natural to love one whom we see than one whom we have not seen; that the first is a lower attainment, more within our reach, while the other is more transcendental, spiritual, and sublime; so that if we cannot acquire the terrestrial virtue of loving our brother whom we have seen, it is vain for us to aspire to the heavenly elevation of loving God whom we have not seen? Nay, to put the matter on that footing is to degrade the grace of brotherly love, and wholly to destroy and overthrow the apostle's noble argument. It is by no means clear that our seeing or not seeing the object of the affection makes any real or serious difference as regards our faculty or

capacity of loving. There is no reason why one whom we have never seen, whom we have known only by report and fame, or by his friendly offices towards us, should not draw our hearts out towards him more even than the most familiar friend whom we see every day. Nay, in this very case it must be so. The unseen God, known only through the discoveries of himself which he makes to us in his word, and the communications of himself which he shares with us by his Spirit, must command our affections more than the best of created beings our eyes can ever light on, if the due order of the two great commandments is to be observed. Nor will it do to hold that our loving our brother is in the least degree more easy or more natural than our loving God; as if, beginning with loving our brother, because he, being nearest us, is the most palpably manifest object of our regard, we might through that means hope to find our love rising to the more remote and less palpably manifest object, even God. No. This love of our brother is not a natural attainment, but a divine gift or qualification, and therefore has this testing-place assigned to it here. Consider again what it is for us to "love because God first loved us." It is loving as he first loved us; loving with the very same sort of love. But the only person whom I can love with that sort of love with which God has loved me is my brother. It is vain for me to say, in this view, that I love God. I cannot love God, in the sense and on the ground required, otherwise than through the intervention of my brother.

For the unseen God cannot possibly be to me the

object of the kind of love with which he first loved me. That is surely love, not to the unseen, but to the seen. It was when he saw me in my original state, like "an unpitied child, cast out in the open field, to the loathing of its person, in that day that it was born," that he first loved me. "When I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee, when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea I said unto thee, when thou wast in thy blood, Live." To me, if I am the conscious object of that love, it must ever seem so marvellous as to be all but incredible, that, seeing me as I was, he should have so loved me; nay more, that, seeing me as I am, under all his gracious dealing with me, he should so love me still. It is because he is God and not man. Well may I, whom, thus seeing me, he so loves, love him warmly, gratefully, in return. It appears almost natural that I should spontaneously love him; I feel almost as if I could not help it. But how apt is such a frame of mind, especially in a highly sensitive and excitable temperament, to grow into a sort of vague, dreamy, mystical or sentimental pietism, such as may be really little better than a refined form of solitary self-indulgence! At all events, it is not the love wherewith he has first loved me;—it is not my loving as he has loved me. If I am so to love, I must love, not the unseen, but the seen. My love must go forth toward those whom I see, as God saw me when he first loved me. And my love must be what his love is; no idle sentiment or barren sympathy, but a love that seeks them, and bears long with them, and knocks, and waits, and

longs, and prays, for their salvation ; a love that gives freely, and without upbraiding ; a love self-sacrificing, self-denying ; a love that will lay down life itself to save them. And when they become by grace, what by grace I am, I must love them, as God loves me, for what I see in them ;—yes, and in spite of what I see in them too. I may still see many things about them to offend me. But what does God see about me ? Do I not try my loving Father's patience far more than any brother can ever try mine ? But still he first loveth me. He is ever first in loving me ; notwithstanding my being often last in loving him. And shall I not be loving my brother, first loving him, and that continually ? Shall I withhold my love until he is all in my eyes that I would like him to be ? How would it be with me if God so postponed his love to me ? Surely, " if I say I love God, and thus hate my brother, I am a liar ;" what I profess is an impossibility. Let me rather give heed to his own announcement of his will : " This commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also" (iv. 21).

II. This commandment of God still further explains the importance attached to our loving our brother, as a sign of the Spirit being given to us. And it does so in two ways.

In the first place, I may be apt to think that this setting of me upon loving my brother, as the test of my " loving, because God has first loved me," disparages the prior claim which God has on me, that I should love him. But it is not so. For I am now told that it is his

special good pleasure that the love I have to him should, as it were, expend itself upon my brother. I need have no fear therefore of my love to my brother on earth interfering with my love to my Father in heaven ; or being imagined to be a substitute for it. There is indeed a spurious sort of brotherly love ; a vague philanthropy ; which is sometimes put in the place of what God is entitled to claim. People substitute a certain easy constitutional good nature, instead of piety towards God ; and even quote the loving apostle as an authority for doing so. They little know the heart of the man they quote, or the real spirit of his writings. Whatever importance he assigns to your loving your brother, it is to your loving him, because God has first loved you ; loving him with the very love with which God has first loved you. And more than that. He appeals to the express commandment of God requiring you in this way to manifest and prove your love to him.

For, secondly, love to God is not ignored, or set aside. On the contrary, the very reason why loving your brother is insisted on so peremptorily is, that it is loving your brother in obedience to God, and out of love to God. In loving your brother, you keep God's commandment ; and you keep it under a very solemn appeal, as it were, from him to you.

Let us hear his voice. You "say that you love me." You have good cause to love me, and I give you credit for loving me. But first, I have to remind you generally, that if "you love because I have first loved you," your love, like mine, must flow out upon visible objects ; on

your brethren, such as they are seen in the world and in the church. And next, I tell you that this is my commandment:—If you love me, and as you love me, love your brother. I do not ask that your love to me, which I willingly accept, should manifest itself in any other way than that.

Ah! what a constant tendency is there in my heart to think that I can love God otherwise, and manifest my love to him otherwise, than in the way of loving my brother, and loving him simply at God's command. I would fain try to lavish upon God directly proofs of my affection, such as, if he were man and not God, might please him. I would fain make him the object of immediate familiar and affectionate acts and offices of endearment; as if I might return and reciprocate his love, as I would that of an equal. But he checks me. "He is my Lord; my goodness reacheth not to him." It is not thus that you can really act out the very love with which I have first loved you. To do so, you must deal as I do with the seen, not the unseen. Nay more. It is not thus that I would have you to act out the very love with which I have first loved you, assuming that you return and reciprocate it to the full. For this is my commandment to you, that loving me you love your brother also. It is my commandment now, and will be the criterion, the test of my judgment in the great day. For, hear the words of my beloved Son, who is then to sit on the throne of judgment: "Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me;"—"Verily

I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me."

III. There is yet another view of the connection between love to the brethren and love to God suggested in the next verse, which seems to bring out the real explanation and ultimate principle of John's teaching as to what we may call the law of divine love:—"Who-soever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him" (v. 1).

Let the precise point of the argument be once more observed. It is that God's love to us should work in us love to our brother; and that in fact its working in us love to our brother is a better test of our knowing and believing it, than our professing any amount of love to God himself. It is so, first, because it is only in loving our brother whom we see, not in loving God whom we do not see, that we can exercise the very love wherewith God has first loved us. It is so, secondly, because in loving our brother we are obeying the commandment of him whom we profess to love; and so proving our love. And it is so, thirdly, because in loving our brother we love one who is begotten of God; and we love him as begotten of God; on the ground of his filial relationship to him who first loved us, and on account of whose first love to us we love.

My brother whom I love, let it be noted, is now viewed as a believer, a child of God. He was not always so, when I loved him with a brother's yearning pity and a brother's desire to save him, any more than I was

always so, when God loved me with a Father's yearning pity and a Father's desire to save me. But he is so now ; and I love him as such. Why ? Because he is born or "begotten of God." I, as begotten of God, love him, as begotten of God. The bond of love is our being both of us begotten of God, and it is a bond which God owns and sanctions ; for the essence of it is love to himself. It is love to him, but it is love to him in a special aspect or character ; as a Father—as one who begets. Is not that, however, the very aspect, the very character, in which he best loves to be loved ? Is he not from the beginning bent on being loved as a Father, as one begetting ? Is it not in that aspect and character, as a Father, as one begetting, that he would be known and loved, when, "bringing in the first begotten into the world, he says, Let all the angels of God worship him ?" Is it otherwise than as a Father, as one begetting, that he would be known and loved, when a voice from heaven proclaims, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased ?" He cares not to receive honour or worship or affection at our hands, unless it is rendered to him as a Father begetting ; as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Yes ; he cries : If you would love me, as I choose to be loved, you must love me as a Father begetting. And the only sure proof of your so loving me, is your loving him who is begotten of me.

First and primarily that must imply your loving Jesus, the Christ, who alone is my only begotten, well-beloved Son. Hear him ;—worship him ;—if you would love me ;—love me as the eternal Father begetting him

from everlasting ; love me as sending him to save, and raising him from the dead with this acknowledgment, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." But now in him I am begetting others to be my sons ; so begetting them by the power of my Spirit, as to make them one with him who is my only begotten Son, that he may be "the first-born among many brethren." One after another, I am thus begetting children to myself. And every one of them is to me what my only begotten Son is. Can you say that he is so to you ? He will be so, if you love me ;—"For every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him" (v. 1).

It is at this point exactly that these two affections, or rather these two modes of the same affection of love,—our loving because God first loved us,—loving God as our Father and men as our brethren,—come to be welded, as it were, together ; and the mode of reasoning seems to be reversed. For whereas before, our loving our brother is made the proof of our loving God in obedience to his commandment, now the matter is put in the very opposite way : "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God" (v. 2).

It is a seasonable and salutary turn that is here given to the train of thought. It ushers in a new subject. But first, it fitly finishes off the present one. It is a useful closing caution. Much stress has been laid upon your loving your brother ; loving him as you see him ; loving him because God commands you ; loving him as begotten of God. But your love to your brethren

needs to be carefully watched. Is it really love to them, as brethren, as children of God? Is it love to them with a view to their being children of God? Is it love to them because they are children of God? For it may be on other grounds and for other reasons that you love them. It may be a love of mere natural sentiment and affection; a love merely human; having little or nothing in common with the love with which God first loved you. To be trustworthy at all, as a test of God's giving you of his Spirit, and so dwelling in you, it must be love having in it the element of godliness; love having respect to God; love to them because God loves them and you love God. "By this we know that we love the children of God," as the children of God, when we love them because "we love God, and keep his commandments" (v. 2).

PART FOURTH.

THE DIVINE FELLOWSHIP OF LIGHT, RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND LOVE, OVERCOMING THE WORLD AND ITS PRINCE.

XXXVI.

LOVE TO GOD KEEPING HIS COMMANDMENTS AND NOT FINDING THEM GRIEVOUS.

“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments : and his commandments are not grievous.”—1 JOHN v. 2, 3.

THE three elements or conditions of the “fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ,” in which John would have us to be joint partakers with himself and his fellow apostles;—Light, the primary; Righteousness, the intermediate; Love, the ultimate one;—having been considered;—we enter, as it seems to me, on a fourth section of this great treatise, in which the divine fellowship regarded as complete is viewed in its relation to the conflict that is ever going on between God and the world—between the Holy and True One and the father of lies. The position of one enjoying fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ in light, righteousness, and love, demands on the one hand very

needs to be carefully watched. Is it really love to them, as brethren, as children of God? Is it love to them with a view to their being children of God? Is it love to them because they are children of God? For it may be on other grounds and for other reasons that you love them. It may be a love of mere natural sentiment and affection; a love merely human; having little or nothing in common with the love with which God first loved you. To be trustworthy at all, as a test of God's giving you of his Spirit, and so dwelling in you, it must be love having in it the element of godliness; love having respect to God; love to them because God loves them and you love God. "By this we know that we love the children of God," as the children of God, when we love them because "we love God, and keep his commandments" (v. 2).

thorough loyalty, and on the other hand ensures very thorough victory ; loyalty as regards God and his law ; victory as regards the wicked one and the system, or state of society, which he organises and influences,—the world lying in him.

Hence the fitness or propriety of the introductory text in this part of the Epistle being one that enforces not only obedience, but obedience so thoroughly loving and loyal as to be divested of all the feeling of irksomeness that is apt to embitter a state of subjection and subordination.

For the assertion,—“his commandments are not grievous,”—is not an incidental remark merely ; it is of the essence of the apostle's argument. If the test of God's giving us of his Spirit, and so dwelling in us (iii. 24, and iv. 13), is to be pre-eminently our loving our brother (iv. 7 and 20, etc.), it concerns us much that our love to our brother should be itself thoroughly tried and proved. Is it love to our fellow-men as seen by us in the same light in which God sees them and us when he loveth us ? (iv. 20). Is it moreover a love that has respect to God (iv. 21) ; that loves the begotten for the begetter's sake (v. 1) ; that loves the children for the relation in which they stand to the Father ; out of love to the Father himself, and in obedience to him ? (v. 2). This last condition is what really connects our loving them with our loving him. And it does so, in virtue of a general law or principle :—“His commandments are not grievous.”

The statement is not absolute but relative. It points out, not what the commandments of God are in themselves, but what they are to us, in our sense and apprehension of them. It may indeed be most truly said of them, considered in themselves, that they are not grievous; on the contrary, they are all most reasonable, equitable, and beneficent. Nothing that God orders us to do, nothing that he requires us to suffer, can fairly be called grievous. But to me they are too often very grievous. I feel them to be irksome and heavy. Yes! That is the exact word. They are heavy, weighty, burdensome.

That is my fault, you say. Be it so. Let us ask how it comes to be so; and let us ask also how it may cease to be so.

But first, let us fix it, as a first principle, in our understandings and hearts, that no keeping of God's commandments will suffice to meet the condition or requirement now in question, that is a keeping of them as grievous. They are not kept at all, in the sense of the identification,—“this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments,”—if they are kept by us as grievous; if in keeping them we feel them to be grievous. Under this conviction, let us look into this matter of the grievousness of God's commandments, and the way of delivery from any sense or suspicion of their being grievous.

1. Beginning at the lowest stage, it is not difficult to see how God's commandments must be grievous to me, if I am bent on giving full scope to the movements of my inner man which are opposed to them. I cannot

shake off the sense of their being binding on me ; and binding on me under the sanction of terrible responsibilities. Let me drown conviction as I may in pleasure's bowl, or stifle it in the din and whirl of worldly business, conscience will not let me take my ease ; I cannot get rid of God's commandments. They haunt and harass me ; they disturb and trouble me ; they are grievous ; often beyond expression grievous. How shall I ever shake off the feeling of their grievousness ?

2. Shall it be by keeping them scrupulously, according to the strictest letter of the law ? I become a pains-taking Pharisee ; a rigid and exact observer of all the commandments. They shall not be grievous to me any more, on account of my wilful opposition to them. But alas ! they are grievous still. I may reduce them to a minimum of obligation, and stretch my keeping of them to a maximum of fulfilment. I may make the least I can of them, by turning their living spirit into outward formal acts ; and I may make the most of myself and my obedience, in the way of exaggerating my sacrifices and services. Still God's commandments are grievous to me. My religion, such as it is, is a mere burden and oppression. I would shake it off if my conscience would allow me.

3. But my conscience will not allow me. It works in me deeper and deeper ; carrying into the innermost recesses of my spiritual nature, not the letter only, but the spirit also of God's commandments. And now, their grievousness comes out in a new and most distressing experience. For now, not only is my conscience con-

vinced, but my will is renewed, with reference to these commandments of God. Both of these results or effects are of the Spirit. They are wrought simultaneously, and in harmony with one another; they act and react on one another. My conscience, quickened by the Spirit, sensitively apprehends a spirituality in God's commandments,—my heart, reconciled by the Spirit, lovingly owns an excellency and beauty in them,—unperceived and unfelt before. I become alive in my conscience to the imperative necessity of real spiritual conformity in my spirit to the holy and loving spirit of the law; and that precisely when I am smitten in my heart of hearts with love to it, because it is so spiritually holy and loving. And what follows? If the work of the Spirit goes on, I sink deeper and deeper, as under a heavy burden, growing always heavier. There is an increasingly oppressive sense, in my conscience, not only of obligation unfulfilled, but of new guilt contracted. There is an increasingly despairing feeling, in my heart, of the opposition of my nature to the commandments of God's law which I love. My very love to the commandments of God,—my very "delight in the law after the inner man,"—brings out now more than ever the feeling of grievousness. Oh, how grievous to me are these commandments of my God, which I so heartily approve and love, but which, alas, I more and more helplessly complain that I cannot satisfy and keep! (Rom. vii. 21-25.)

4. But "there is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (Rom. viii. 1.) The element of

grievousness is extracted from God's commandments, only through my believing consciousness and experience of that great life-giving truth.

How complete is the provision thus made for eradicating every root of bitterness that might make us feel God's commandments to be grievous!

There is, *first*, a removal of the curse, or the condemnation, and a complete restoration of our right standing with God. The element of grievousness arising out of the law's righteous sentence of wrath is removed, in a way that completely divests the very sentence itself of all its grievousness. I cannot rebel against the judgment, however terrible, which the righteous law, with its broken commands, entails on me; I cannot complain of it as grievous when, embracing the cross, I am one with him who there on my behalf endured and exhausted it. Nor can the demand of perfect compliance with the spirit of all the commandments, as the only condition of life, grieve me now, when I see it so fully met on my behalf by the obedience unto death of God's own beloved Son.

Then, *secondly*, there is the renewal of my whole moral nature, bringing it back to its original conformity to the nature of God, as that nature is expressed and manifested in his commandments. This also is essential to the removal of the feeling of grievousness. If I am a spiritual man as regards the commandments of God, then,—apart from the feeling of the utter hopelessness of my ever being justified, in the only way in which I now care to be justified, in terms of the law, fully vindicated and satisfied,—there is the other feeling of the

utter hopelessness of my ever being sanctified, after the fashion of the only sort of holiness that can now content me, the holy loving law of the holy loving God. But here too my case is met. In Christ Jesus my Lord I have not only justifying righteousness but renewing grace. The grievousness of a felt discrepancy between my nature and God's commandments, between my spirit and theirs, need not continue. There may still be a vast difference in degree; but there need be no difference in kind. My moral nature and that of God are now one, if I am renewed after his image. May not the grievousness of his commandments now cease for ever?

5. An ominous fact here looms out from across the gulf that separates the primeval paradise from our present world. Before the fall, in the garden of Eden, God's commandment was felt to be grievous; the only commandment which he saw fit formally to give. The reptile insinuation—"Yea, hath God said ye shall not?"—found entrance into the ear, the mind, the heart, of righteous innocence, created after the image of God. To Eve, to Adam, yet unfallen,—with the divine likeness in which they were made still entire,—the commandment of God came to be grievous. What are we to make of that?

It was the devil's fault. Be it so; let him bear the blame. But what of his own sin and fall, the sin and fall of himself and all his host? There was no tempter admitted into their abode. There were no outward circumstances to explain the rise of any feeling of grievousness in their breasts. Yet to them, still unfallen, the

commandment of God was grievous. What shall we say to these things? How do they affect us?

Ah! do they not serve to bring out a new and most blessed view of the gospel method of salvation? John says expressly and absolutely, without qualification or reserve, that "God's commandments are not grievous." He says this with reference to himself and all believers. His meaning must be, that he and they are in such a state, and of such a mind, as to preclude the possibility of God's commandments ever being, or ever becoming, grievous either to him or to them. And what does that imply?

If the plan of grace made provision only for our being restored, in respect of position and nature, to what our first parents were before they fell,—if we were to be even as the angels were,—however thoroughly that end might be accomplished, it would not afford any adequate security against God's commandments being felt to be grievous. For, in fact, the risk to be obviated, the evil to be remedied and guarded against, is not that God's commandments in detail are grievous, some more so and some less, but that his commandments as a whole are grievous. The grievance is that he commands us at all. Even when the thing commanded is most easy and pleasant, most manifestly right and good, its being commanded may make it grievous. That was the case in heaven, when the commandment to "worship the Son" turned out to be grievous to so many of the yet unfallen angels. It was the case also in paradise, when the commandment not to eat of the forbidden tree became griev-

ous to our first parents. It might be the case again, in paradise restored, in heaven gained, if we who are redeemed and renewed were to be merely such, in position and in nature, as the angels were in heaven, and our first parents were in paradise, before they fell.*

The real seat of the mischief is not reached unless the very possibility of our ever feeling it grievous to be commanded is thoroughly, conclusively, and effectually, precluded and barred. And what potent spell, what resistless charm, is to secure that blessed result? What but the spell, the charm of love? And what love? What but the love which is God's very essence, manifested in a way altogether new and inconceivable beforehand; in a way in which, but for the entrance of sin and evil into his moral creation, it never could have been manifested? Yes. That love of God, manifested in his sending his Son to be the propitiation for our sins, —known and believed by us,—bringing us into a perfect love-relationship to him and working in us love of the very same sort with itself,—that love of him who is love, thus manifested to us, apprehended by us, and reproduced in us,—that love it is, and that alone, which puts finally and for ever away out of our hearts every shred and vestige of the old spirit, the old leaven, which,—jealous of restraint and aspiring to independence,—counts it a grievance to be commanded. This is that new thing under the sun for which sin or moral evil gave occasion, and for which that alone could give occasion. This is God's method of overcoming evil with

* See "Lectures on the Fatherhood of God;" especially Appendix I.

good ; higher good than could ever otherwise have been reached. This is the triumph of love ; reconciling man's proud soul to dependence and obedience ; expelling the last lingering feeling of soreness because he is under authority ; the last lingering feeling of desire to be his own master, or to rule himself.

Ah ! if that love has its free course in me ; if I know it and believe it ; if I enter cordially into that perfect relationship and fellowship of love for which it makes provision, and consent to be on that footing of perfect love with God on which he would have me to be ; if now, in consequence, all servile fear is clean gone out of me, and only filial reverence and affection reign within me ; how can it ever, at any time, seem to me grievous that this God should command me ?

Grievous ! O my redeeming God, my loving Father, the loving Father of my Lord ! Grievous that thou shouldst command me ! Grievous that I should be under thee ! Grievous that I am not independent of thee ; left to choose for myself, instead of having thee to choose for for me ; left free to do my own will, and not thine ! Nay I will not, I cannot any more take exception to thy rightful rule over me, O thou loving God and Father who so lovingly makest me thine own ! No, nor to any instance of its exercise, be the instance what it may. Whatever thou commandest, in the line of doing or of suffering, shall please me now, simply because thou commandest it. I dare not promise that there shall be no groans, and tears, and cries, in the doing or the suffering of it. There were groans, and

tears, and cries, in the doing and suffering of thy will, when the doer and sufferer of it was thine own beloved Son. But to this I will seek to attain, thy grace helping me, that to me now, as one with him, not one of thy commandments shall ever be more grievous than was that "commandment" to him, in obedience to which "he laid down his life for the sheep."

That was his loving us, with a true brother's love, because "he loved God and kept his commandments." That also was his "overcoming the world," and the world's prince. Thus he proved his love to God, by keeping his commandments; keeping them as not finding any of them to be grievous. Not grievous to him was the commandment to save his people by dying in their stead. Not grievous to him was the commandment to encounter Satan on their behalf, and win for them the victory over Satan's world.

And now what is his word to you? Is it not a word giving you the assurance that you in him will find God's commandments no more grievous to you than they were to him? Yes! Once more hear his voice: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." All ye that labour and are heavy laden; ye who are painfully seeking to fulfil the letter of God's law and finding it very hard; working laboriously at religion as at a weary task; feeling God's service to be a very drudgery and weariness of

the flesh ;—or ye who, smitten with a sense of the beauty of holiness, the spirituality of the commandment, and the exceeding sinfulness of sin, are desperately striving to get rid of indwelling corruption, and bring your whole inner man into subjection to God and to godliness ;—“all ye who labour and are heavy laden,” not succeeding, not attaining, not able to rise above the feeling of its being, after all, a heavy load that is imposed upon you in the keeping of God's commandments,—“Come unto me ; I will give you rest.”

But how ? “Take my yoke upon you.” “For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Thy yoke, O blessed Jesus, easy ! Thy burden light ! The yoke thou didst take on thyself when thou didst consent to serve and obey, even to the laying down of thy life for us,—was that easy ? The burden thou hadst to bear when, all thy life long and in thy death, thou hadst, in obedience to the Father, and as his servant, to carry our sicknesses, our sorrows, our sins,—was that light ? Is it that yoke of thine that thou invitest us to take upon us ? Is it that burden of thine that thou callest us to bear ? And is it in the taking upon us of that yoke of thine, and in the bearing of that burden of thine, that thou assurest us we shall find rest unto our souls ?

Even so. Thus and not otherwise will I give you rest when you come to me,—“Take my yoke upon you.” But that it may be really my yoke that you take upon you,—“Learn of me ; for I am meek and lowly in heart.” Learn of me my own meekness and

lowliness of heart. Learn of me, coming to me, abiding in me, growing up into me, getting it from me and in me,—learn of me that meek, lowly, hearty love and loyalty to my Father,—having in it no element at all of the servile, for all in it is filial,—which makes the hardest yoke easy, the heaviest burden light. For it is thus that, in the consciousness of unbroken filial oneness with him who lays on me the yoke and the burden, I can lift up to him the eye of quiet resignation and reliance, and say,—“Father, glorify thy name;” “Father, not my will but thine be done;” “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” Thy commandments are not grievous to me, for “by keeping them I abide in thy love” (John xv. 10).

XXXVII.

FILIAL FAITH OVERCOMING THE WORLD.

“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world : and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God ?”—1 JOHN v. 4, 5.

HERE again the apostle brings in “the world ;” and he does so in the very midst of a singularly high estimate of the believer’s standing and character. He has placed him in a relation of close intimacy with God, and of serious responsibility as regards the special duty which that implies. For what is brotherly love, as John describes it ? It is our letting the very love with which God has loved us go forth, through us, to all men ; and our embracing all who accept that love as brethren in the Lord. John has associated this exercise of love on our part, not only with God’s exercise of love to us, but with our obligation of loving obedience to God. That loving obedience, if it is to be the obedience of persons accepting and transmitting the love of God, must be uncomplaining and ungrudging. It must be obedience counting none of God’s commandments grievous ; because it owns freely God’s absolute right to command, and therefore confesses that nothing which he commands can be wrong.

But the world comes in ; and it must be somehow disposed of, and got rid of. It must be disposed of, and got rid of, in its bearing on our position and our duty as now brought out. In this view I ask you to consider—I. What the world is, and how it is that the only way of dealing with it is to overcome it. And II. How the world is to be overcome by the new birth and through faith.

I. The indefiniteness,—the sort of unsatisfactory vagueness,—that is sometimes felt to attach to the scriptural idea of the world, is here somewhat obviated by the connection or train of thought, in which it occurs. The fact (ver. 4), that “whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world,” is given apparently as the reason why to such a one (ver. 3) “the commandments of God are not grievous.” The world, therefore, it might seem, must be characterised by an impression or feeling to the opposite effect ;—that the commandments of God are grievous. Wherever that impression or feeling prevails, there is the world. Of course, there are other characteristic features by which the world may be recognised and identified ; some of which are brought out elsewhere in this epistle, as well as in other books of the New Testament. For the most part, indeed, when the world is spoken of in any passage of scripture as the antagonist of God,—of his kingdom, his cause, his people, his law,—there is, in the passage itself, some clue to guide or help us to a right apprehension of what particular aspect of the world is meant. And it might serve to give point and precision to the teaching of any scriptural text on

the *wholes* of the world—the relation to us as believers and our attitude towards it—if instead of contenting ourselves with a general notion of it as a system or *wholly* *wholly* *opposed* to *politics* we fastened on the *exact* *sort* of *oppression* which the text in question may be fitted to suggest. As to our present text, for instance, we can have little difficulty. What is the world which faith overcomes? It is whatever system or way of life, whatever society or companionship of men, tends to make us feel God's commandments, or any of them, to be grievous.

Here then, at all events, we have no mere vague denunciation of some formidable, but somewhat dim and shadowy enemy; but a definition sufficiently intelligible, and sufficiently precise and practical. Ponder it for a little, and apply it as a test. What is the world to you? It is whatever, it is whoever, is apt to make you feel God's commandments to be grievous. That is a searching test, if faithfully applied by one deeply conscious of that carnal nature in himself, even in his renewed self, which is ever ready to prompt or to welcome the suggestion. That carnal nature in you is not necessarily the world; but all that ministers to it is the world. The natural disposition in you to count the commandments of God grievous is very strong. Do you feel its strength? Are you sensitively alive to its continual and powerful working? Does it vex and distress you? If so, and in proportion as it is so, you are in a position to discern this mark by which the world may be known; whether as an order of things, or as a fellowship of men.

There is an order, or, if you will, a disorder, of things ; a way of occupying the mind, amusing the fancy, gratifying the taste, stimulating the passions, warming the imagination, interesting the heart ; which, if you are spiritual, and honest in your spirituality, you must feel, when you try it by this touchstone, to be the world. Ask yourself, at the close of an hour or two, or half an hour, spent in reading, or in musing, or in walking abroad, or at table, or at any sort of work, or recreation, or elegant accomplishment that you like :—Has the occupation left you less inclined than you were before to comply with a call of duty, to submit to a sacrifice of inclination, to engage in prayer, to go forth on an errand of pious love ? Are you more disposed than otherwise you might have been to feel any such demand upon you to be a sort of interruption, and as such to be somewhat irksome ? I am not concerned to maintain that absolutely and always this is of itself proof positive that what you have been occupied about is the world. But this I say ; it is at least a very strong presumption. And when you find that upon your being occupied in the same way a second time, or a third, the effect is much the same, the presumption rises into certainty. Whatever it may be as regards others, so far as you are concerned, to all practical intents and purposes, that is the world. So also, in the matter of your intercourse with men, this rule of judgment will often help you to separate the precious from the vile. Who are they from whose company, however otherwise pleasant and profitable, you come, a little, just a very little, more apt than

is your wont, to think that God is pressing rather hard upon you, or upon some other child of God whose case you pity? You are tempted slightly to lose patience and temper. You may be at a loss to explain how this comes about; for you cannot perhaps lay your finger on anything particular in what has been going on that may explain it. But you feel it; and that should be enough for you. Do not hesitate to acknowledge that such meetings and companionships are to be regarded and treated by you as the world. Let it be fixed in your minds as a great truth, that the world to be overcome comprehends all that you come in contact with which has any tendency to awaken in you the feeling that "God's commandments are grievous."

If this is a true account of the world, as here presented to us, it must be very evident that it is a world to be "overcome." We cannot deal with it, if we would avoid its deleterious and deadly influence, in any other way. We cannot escape from it, or put it aside. As regards some of its forms and manifestations we may do so. Where we have freedom of choice, we may shun its occupations and companionships. And when these are of such a nature in themselves, or have such influence upon us,—or upon any brother whom we are called to love,—as to foster the impression of God's commandments being grievous, we are bound to shun them. We are under no obligation whatever to frequent the theatre, the ball-room, the race-course; to court the friendship of dissolute hunters after pleasure or frivolous votaries of fashion; to expose ourselves to the contamination of

unprofitable reading and discourse. So far we may and must "come out and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing, if we would be the sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty." But we do not thus get rid of the world. It still presses hard upon us, with its suggestions from every side that the service of God is not perfect freedom. All the ongoings and arrangements of its necessary business, even the customary usages of the home circle itself, are but too ready to convey impressions to that effect. Nay, in the loneliest desert,—in the remotest cell hermit ever dwelt in,—we cannot shut out airy voices whispering in the ear that something we have to do or bear is hard ; we cannot lay an arrest on ideal fascinations shedding a gloom on the cloister's austere devotion, or on the real trials of life. No ; the world cannot be shunned. Neither can it be conciliated. We cannot make any compromise with it. The only effectual, the only possible way is to overcome it.

And the manner of overcoming it must be peculiar. It must be such as thoroughly to meet and obviate that tendency to minister to a rebellious frame of mind which constitutes the chief characteristic, and indeed the very essence, of what is here called the world.

II. Two explanations accordingly, of this overcoming of the world are given ; the one having reference to the original source, the other to the continued following out, of the victory (ver. 4).

1. "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world." So the victory begins ; that is its seed or germ. And as to its seed or germ, it is complete ; potentially

complete, though not so in actual result, fully and in detail. Being born or begotten of God implies the overcoming of the world. For whatever is born of God necessarily, *ipso facto*, overcomes the world. The statement is very wide ; and it seems evidently to imply that there is positively no other way of overcoming the world except by our being born or begotten of God ; that God himself could not enable us to do this otherwise. There is that in our being born or begotten of God which secures, and which alone can secure, our overcoming the world. And what can that be but the begetting in us of a frame of mind which cuts up by the roots the whole strength of the world's hold over us ;—the idea, namely, of God's commandments being grievous ?

Consider, in this view, what it is to be born or begotten of God. It is more than being created, or even created anew. It is not our being made anew, or made over again ; as if the simple fiat of omnipotence went forth : Let what has made itself corrupt be re-made, pure as at the first. That would not be begetting on God's part, or being begotten on ours. The new birth is indeed a new creation ; but it is something more ; at least it is a new creation of a very special sort. Christ's birth was a creation. In his birth there was created for him a body, a holy humanity, in the Virgin's womb. But the angel said, "That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." He was to be called the Son of God in a higher sense than any sense in which the first man might have been so called ; and that with reference even,—nay with reference especially,—

to his human nature and condition. He was made man, not by a mere creative act as Adam was ; but by generation ; being “conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost.” So also in us the new creation is a new birth. When the Holy Ghost makes us new creatures, we are “begotten of God ;” “his seed is in us,”—the divine germ of a new nature and a new life.

This, let it be noted also, is something more than God’s consenting to reckon us his children, by a gracious act of adoption. It is his making us really, in our very nature, his children. It is not merely that he takes us to be on a new footing with him, as I might take a houseless orphan to be to me as a son. Literally and truly he begets us as children to himself. The houseless orphan whom I desire to have for my son may never be really a son to me. I may fail in all my attempts to make him, in any true or valid sense, my son. He will be my servant, because he cannot help it ; he will render to me punctual, and even punctilious, obedience. But alas ! it is not such obedience as I care for. I see too clearly that he often looks on me still as a hard master, and feels my commandments to be grievous. No such disappointment can await the Almighty Father. He begets by his Spirit those whom he adopts in his Son. They are begotten of God ; begotten by the agency of his Spirit, as his incarnate Son was ; begotten, to be to him what he is ; to feel towards him as he feels. That ensures their overcoming whatever might tempt them to count God’s commandments grievous ; or, in other words, their overcoming the world.

“Look unto Jesus.” Was ever any servant of God,—for such he was,—placed in circumstances more likely to make the commandments of God be felt as grievous—such commandments especially as he had to fulfil? Go with him through all his experience in the world. The commandments of God laid on him; the things he had to do, the things he had to suffer; were surely capable of being represented to him as grievous, and regarded by him as grievous. They were so represented to him by the world and its prince. Were they so regarded by him? And if not, why not? Because he was “begotten of God;” begotten of God, not merely as to his divine nature, but as to his human nature also; as “God manifest in the flesh;” “Jesus Christ come in the flesh;” “the man Christ Jesus.” In respect of his manhood, as well as his Godhead, he is the only begotten Son of God; occupying a son’s place in the heart of God; having a son’s affection towards God in his own heart. Therefore no commandment of God, whatever tears and groans and cries it might extort from his feeble flesh, could ever be grievous to his filial spirit. So, in virtue of his being born of God, he overcame the world.

And so also we in virtue of our being born of God, overcome the world; the world which is ever insinuating that the commandments of God are grievous; that the things he requires us to do, and the things he requires us to suffer, are hard. We never can withstand these insinuations of the world, fitting in so well into our own carnal disposition, unless we stand in a filial relation to God, and are possessed of a filial frame of mind

—a filial heart—towards him; being not only adopted by him, but begotten of him. But being his children indeed; standing to him in the relation of sons, and having our whole inner man renewed into harmony and correspondence with that relation; being to him all that his only begotten Son is, and feeling towards him as his only begotten Son feels; we have such personal knowledge of him as our Father, such loving acquaintance with him, such insight into his character and plans, such cordial sympathy with him in the great work which he is carrying on in the earth, as must convince us that nothing he can demand of us as his ministers and servants, nothing he can lay upon us, can be anything else than what we ought to welcome in the words and in the spirit of Jesus: "I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart."

2. This implies faith; and faith in constant and lively exercise. Our overcoming the world is not an achievement completed at once, and once for all, in our being begotten of God. It is a life-long business; a prolonged and continuous triumph in a prolonged and continuous strife. We are to be always anew, all our days, overcoming the world; "and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Our being born of God does indeed give us the victory; it puts us in the right position, and endows us with the needful power, for overcoming the world. But we have still before us the work of actually, from day to day, all our lifelong, in point of fact, overcoming the world. And it is by faith that we do so. Our being born of God is the

source of the victory; our faith is the realisation of it, or the acting of it out. Our being born of God fits and qualifies us for overcoming the world; our faith really overcomes it.

Nor is it difficult to harmonise these two things; our being "born of God and so overcoming the world," and "the victory which overcometh the world being our faith." For our being born of God, which is the secret of our overcoming the world, is itself intimately connected with faith; it originates faith and culminates in faith; its immediate outgoing in activity is faith. And therefore faith, continually exercised, constantly acting, is the instrument of victory. Nor is it merely faith apprehending a past event in our moral history—an accomplished change in our spiritual condition, our being "born of God." It is faith exercised upon a present object; not looking back or looking in, but looking out; "looking unto Jesus." For "who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" Jesus is the ever-present object of this ever-acting faith; Jesus considered as the Son of God. For it is the sonship of Jesus that our faith grasps, embraces, and appropriates. And it is because it does so that it is "the victory which overcometh the world." Who is he who is at any given moment, and with reference to any given trial or temptation, really overcoming the world? Is it not he who, at that very moment, and with special reference to that very trial or temptation, is "believing that Jesus is the Son of God;" so believing as to be one with him in his being so; of one mind and of one heart,

then and there, as to the precise matter in hand or the particular question raised ; of one mind and heart with Jesus the Son of God ; judging the case as he, the Son of God, would have judged it ; feeling as he, the Son of God, would have felt ; acting as in the circumstances he, the Son of God, would have acted ?

Jesus himself had to overcome, and did overcome, the world. How ? Was it not by faith ?—by faith in his own sonship, or rather faith in God as his Father—faith ever intensely and vividly realising it as a truth that God was his Father ? It was as the Son of God that he looked out upon the world ; from his Father's point of view. It was as the Son of God that he met the world's attractions ; the consciousness of his Father's love stripped them in his eyes of all their charms. It was as the Son of God that he was tempted ; trust in his Father's faithfulness kept him without sin. It was as the Son of God that he suffered, and suffered willingly, that his Father might be glorified. Into his pure, calm, filial spirit, there never did, there never could, enter the very faintest shadow of a suspicion that anything his Father ordered or ordained could be otherwise than just, and right, and good. Therefore the world had no hold over him ; "the prince of the world had nothing in him." There was not in him any latent or lurking element of possible impatience under the yoke, to which the world might appeal, and by means of which, persuading him that God's way was harsh, the world might subdue him. For though he became the servant of the Father, he was still the Son ; and therefore in serving the Father, being

still the Son, he overcame the world. So we also, believing that Jesus is the Son of God, and being ourselves sons of God in him, may find that in this way we can overcome the world. At all events, we may be very sure that there is no other "victory that overcometh the world" but only "this faith;" this filial faith in God our Father; giving the lie to all the world's aspersions on his character, and all the world's complaints against his government and law.

O child of God, wouldest thou overcome the world? Is it thine earnest, anxious, longing desire so to overcome the world that it shall never have power any more to make thee feel any one of thy God's commandments to be grievous? Is it a distress to thee that such a feeling still prevails so much and so often in thy secret soul—that thy walk before God, thy fellowship with God, thy service of God, are all so marred, tainted, cramped, and hindered, by the ever-recurring suggestion that this or that thing required of thee is hard? Yes; it is hard to cut off a right hand and pluck out a right eye; hard to deny self and take up the cross; hard to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts; hard to go forth unto Christ without the camp bearing his reproach; hard to forego a seemingly harmless pleasure; hard to part with one dearly beloved; hard to bear excruciating pain; hard to die by premature decay; hard to lay down life for a brother! Ah! is it a grief to thee, a sore mortification and disappointment, that thou art so easily moved by the world;—for it is thy love of the world, or the world's power over thee, that moves

thee ;—thus to think, thus to feel, if not even thus to speak? Here, and only here, is the remedy. Believe, be always believing, that Jesus, so called because he saves his people from their sins, is the Son of God ; that it is as the Son of God that he saves thee ; and that he saves thee so as to make thee a son ; being himself the first-born among many brethren. Rise to the full height of that great position. Realise its greatness ; the greatness of its freedom ; “the glorious liberty of the sons of God.” That is “the victory which overcometh the world,” even such “faith” as that.

XXXVIII.

THE THREE WITNESSES AND THEIR AGREEMENT.

“This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. . . . And there are three that bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood : and these three agree in one.”*—1 JOHN v. 6 and 8.

THE “faith” which is “the victory that overcometh the world” has for its object Jesus, viewed as the Son of God ; for “who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” This faith, however, does not simply contemplate Jesus as the Son of God ; dwelling exclusively either on his original and eternal sonship, or on that sonship as manifested in his human nature. It has to deal with his work as well as with his person. It has to deal with him as “come ;” “come in the flesh ;” “come into the world.” And in particular, it has to deal with two accessories or accompaniments of his coming ; two distinguishing facts or features characteristic of the manner of his coming and its design. He came, he is come, through the medium, or in the element, not of water only,

* I acquiesce of course in the rejection of the 7th verse, and of the words “in earth” in the 8th verse, as not in the original. I need not argue the point, for it is now all but universally admitted by intelligent critics.

but of blood also. So coming he is "Jesus the Christ ;" the anointed Saviour ; and it is our faith in him as the Son of God so come,—as Jesus Christ coming by or with water and blood,—which is the victory that overcometh the world. "He is come by water and blood ;" not "by water only," as his forerunner came, "but by water and blood ;"—himself undergoing a baptism of blood as well as of water, and so having blood and water available for those who are one with him.

This was conclusively indicated when on the cross his side was pierced, and "forthwith came thereout blood and water" (John xix. 34). Then he was seen coming by water and by blood. And the fact was verified on the spot. "He that saw it bare record, and his record is true, and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe" (ver. 35). So John writes in his Gospel, very emphatically giving us his testimony, as an eyewitness, for a ground of our faith.

Here, in his epistle, he points to testimony still higher ; not human, but divine ; testimony, not to the mere matter of fact which he saw, but to its spiritual significancy and power, that we may so believe as by our faith to overcome the world ;—"it is the Spirit that beareth witness." And of the Spirit as bearing witness, not only may it be said that "his record is true and he knoweth that he saith true." He is truth itself ; "he is himself truth," and he guides into all truth. This is a greater witness than John could be ; for the Spirit attests, not the outward historical occurrence merely, but its inward meaning and saving virtue.

But even the Spirit can thus bear witness only by associating with himself two other witnesses. These are "the water and the blood;" the very water and the very blood by which "Jesus Christ came." Bearing witness that he so "cometh by water and blood," the Spirit makes the water and the blood themselves witnesses along with him;—so that "there are three that bear witness, the Spirit, the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one" (ver. 8).

Two topics here suggest themselves for inquiry,—I. The manner of this threefold testimony; and II. Its harmony and completeness.

I. Let the manner of this threefold testimony be considered. Let the witnesses be, as it were, called in court; first the single witness indicated in the sixth verse—the Spirit; and then the other two pointed out in the eighth—the water and the blood.

In the first place, "the Spirit beareth witness." He is the first and principal witness: pre-eminently, the witness-bearer. That he is a fitting witness cannot be doubted; the only question is, how does he give his testimony? For he does not appear visibly; he does not speak audibly; we neither "see his shape at any time, nor hear his voice," And yet it is to us that he testifies; and he testifies to us personally, as the living Spirit to living men, present with us here and now. How then does he make his presence known? And how does he make the purport of his testimony understood? We are called in this matter to take evidence and decide a cause; and, strange to say, the first and

principal witness cited is one whom we neither see nor hear.

But there may be evidence of his presence as satisfactory as sight; and there are modes of conveying testimony as intelligible and unequivocal as spoken language. The Spirit may announce his presence by "a rushing mighty noise," or by his swift descent, like a dove, from on high. By lambent flames, "cloven tongues as of fire," resting or flickering over the heads of an assembled company; by new and strange languages proceeding from their mouths; by some evidently supernatural work wrought; by some supernatural gift, or endowment, or power imparted; or by moral miracles of converting and quickening grace, as indisputable as any of these; the presence of the Spirit may be ascertained. And if now having him actually with us, we inquire what as a witness he has to say—then, in the inseparable connection which is to be observed between these signs of his presence and certain facts or statements otherwise known to us, we may obtain a silent indeed, but a sufficiently explicit reply. We have the word spoken at first, and then written, by holy men of old as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. And the Spirit, by whose inspiration that word was originally given, may significantly acknowledge it now as his own, by accompanying tokens of his influence not to be mistaken. He may, as it were, in our presence and to our satisfaction, before whom he is cited as a witness, homologate what he dictated ages ago; and so expressly signify, by some unquestionable demonstration of his

power, his actual concurrence now in what was said or written then, as to make it strictly and directly his testimony to us personally; and his testimony brought down to the present hour. Thus, in the word, we have the deposition of the Spirit as first and principal witness in this great cause; we have the precise matter of his testimony. And we have it, not merely as the written report of former evidence, but as evidence emitted anew by him to us now.

This is especially important. The appeal is clearly made, not to the Spirit as having borne witness formerly, and left his testimony on record; but to the Spirit as bearing witness now. For the witness in this case is not, as in other and ordinary cases, one who dies or goes out of the way. In such cases, we must content ourselves with the notes of the deposition, the report or record of the testimony, as given by him and taken down at the time. Here, the witness is ever living and ever accessible. He is not afar off; he is always at hand; to verify his own evidence. Nor can he be at a loss for ways and means of doing so. He is indeed determined, so to speak, to preserve his incognito and keep himself concealed. But he is almighty, the Spirit of power, having command over all the moving forces of the world,—the world both of matter and of mind. Therefore he can give intimation of his presence by works peculiarly his own. And these works now he may so connect with words spoken or written of old, as to make us feel,—not only that he then suggested the words as his,—but that he is addressing them to us now

as his; not only that he did once bear witness, but that he is now bearing witness, and that this is his testimony. Thus the Spirit bears present witness through his own inspired word.

And now, secondly, in the course of giving this testimony—in his very manner of giving it, the Spirit associates with himself other two witnesses, “the water and the blood.” And these, like the first, are present witnesses. The Spirit, in bearing witness, “takes of what is Christ’s and shows it unto us.” He points to the son of God, Jesus Christ come in the flesh; and especially to his coming “by water and blood.”

But how, it may be asked, can the water and the blood be brought forward as witnesses now? They might bear silent testimony at the time when they flowed from the smitten side of Jesus on the cross, and they to whom the Spirit was then bearing witness might see, through his teaching,—as the dying thief did,—in the pure water and the precious blood, a confirmation of the truth concerning Christ, that in him there is not only renewal of nature, but redemption also, and remission of sins. But the water and the blood are not accessible to us now. The water was spilt on the ground; and the earth opened her mouth to receive the blood. We would seek in vain, where the cross stood, for any traces of the drops that then fell beside it; and even if some of these drops had been preserved and handed down to us, they would have been but dead relics, such as superstition loves to dote upon,—not living witnesses, such as the living spirit may associate in witness-bearing

with himself. The water then and the blood are removed out of the way; we have them no more within our reach. We have indeed sacramental signs and seals of them, in the water of baptism and the wine of communion. But these elements are really as dead as are the water and the blood which they represent. There cannot be more life in the water of baptism, than there is now in the water that came from the Saviour's side; nor in the wine of communion than in the blood. But the water and the blood are, as to the matter of them, irrecoverably lost. Still therefore the question remains—How do they now give present living evidence along with the living Spirit?

The real explanation is to be found in this consideration, that though the event itself,—the flowing of water and blood from the pierced side,—was of brief duration and soon passed away, the relation in which it stands to heaven and earth is permanent and perpetual. For it is the relation in which it stands to heaven and earth, to the divine government and to our human interests, which alone gives to the event, or to any circumstance connected with the event, its significance as a testimony. The death of Christ, as a mere fact, occupied but a point of time in the lapse of eternal ages; but in its bearing upon the designs of God and the destinies of man,—and it is that alone which renders it important,—it has properly no date at all. "From before the foundation of the world," Jesus is "the Lamb slain;" he is the Lamb slain, to the close of all things. Whatever therefore took place or was going on at Christ's death, we are

to regard as taking place and going on now. Viewed as mere incidents of a historical transaction, the water and the blood flowed once, and have long ceased to flow; but then, viewed merely in that light, they tell us nothing, they bear witness to nothing, beyond the bare fact of a human being having died. It is only when they are viewed in their relation to God and to man, that the water and the blood have a tale to tell—a testimony to give. And considered in that light, they must be held as having flowed from the beginning, and as continuing to the end to flow.

Hence their testimony is inseparable from that of the Spirit. For it is not in or by themselves, but only in and with and by the Spirit, that the water and the blood are or can be witnesses at all. Only through the Spirit have the wounds of Jesus an intelligible voice and utterance to convince and move the soul. For in truth it may be emphatically said of the water and the blood, and of any testimony they may bear, "It is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing." The water and the blood carnally apprehended, regarded and understood after the flesh, are not witnesses at all; at least not witnesses of any heavenly transaction, or of any divine and spiritual truth; and of course not witnesses of the bearing of any such transaction or any such truth on the highest spiritual and heavenly interests of men. But "spiritually discerned," the water and the blood,—the water for purification and the blood for atonement,—like all the words and works of Jesus, are "spirit and life" (John vi. 63). And thus the whole truth concerning Christ and his death attested by the Spirit,—and

by the water and the blood associated with the Spirit and rendered significant and saving by him,—becomes the source of spiritual life and strength to every one who believes that “Jesus is the Son of God,” and enables him therefore “to overcome the world.” For “this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith;” that faith of ours which grasps the threefold testimony of the Spirit, the water, and the blood. Here is Jesus Christ coming by water and blood; very specially by blood; “not by water only, but by water and blood.” And the Spirit, with the water and the blood, and by means of them as joint-witnesses with himself, testifies to him as “coming by water and blood” and as, in virtue of his so coming, giving us the victory over the world. Not otherwise than by taking the water and the blood as joint-witnesses with himself, can the Spirit commend to us Jesus Christ, as triumphing in his own person, and causing us who are one with him to triumph, over sin, and the guilt of sin, and the power of sin;—over all that makes God’s service a bondage to us and his commandments grievous; over what constitutes the essence of the world which we have to overcome if we would walk as children with our Father in heaven.

II. Such being the nature of this threefold testimony, let us look now at its harmony: “These three agree in one.” This may perhaps be best brought out by putting the supposition of a partial reception of the testimony in different aspects; and showing how, in every case, the partial reception, if fairly followed out, requires and demands the acceptance of the whole, and must lead the earnest soul to that result.

1. There are some who seem to acquiesce in the testimony of the Spirit, but without having respect either to the water or to the blood. To this extent at least they may go, that they admit the reality of those supernatural works by which the Spirit of old bore witness to the word, and generally they admit the authority of the word as attested by the Spirit to be the word of God. They acknowledge, in a sort of vague and general way, that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. He is declared and proved to be so by the Spirit of truth, and they do not question what the Spirit says. Theirs is a kind of indefinite, blind, stupid reliance on something—one knows not what—that the Spirit says in the Scriptures about Christ. But do they really receive the testimony, even of the Spirit alone, in any sense consistent with fairness or intelligence? What would be thought of such conduct in reference to temporal things? Take a somewhat analogous instance.

I come to you with information to give you, on a point deeply affecting your welfare. I hold in my hands a document which I assure you is of urgent consequence to you,—securing you against the hazard of loss—putting you in the way of great gain. And how do you receive me? You take the document out of my hands, with many formal compliments and thanks, and many professions of personal respect for me. You will prize it very highly, pay it all due attention, and seek to profit by it. But I have much to say to you regarding the document and its contents. I seek to prolong the conversation with you upon the document. I wish to

press upon your regard certain parts of it which I am willing to open up to you; and in particular I am most anxious to help you in turning its discoveries to good practical account. You listen impatiently; for I weary you. Is it not enough that you take the document as I desire you, and really intend not to neglect it? So, getting rid of me, you retain my paper. You treat it with considerable deference; you duly look into it; you find in it some hints that you may follow, some directions with which you can comply; and if you do stumble at a few dark things in it, this is no more than might have been anticipated beforehand. At all events, you are in possession of the deed, which you have been told is—somehow or other—to secure to you safety and victory.

Is it thus that we are treating the blessed Spirit of God? We receive his testimony; that is, we take the Bible at his hands, and on the whole admit as true what he told the world about Christ when he inspired the Bible. But we do not suffer him to bear witness to us now. If we did, he would not indeed give evidence now by such signs as of old; but he would give evidence by tokens no less satisfactory, because no less divine. In particular, the Spirit would bear witness, not generally and vaguely to Christ coming as a Saviour, but specially to his coming by water and blood. This he would do by his divine agency, appealing to our whole inner man, and working there, with and by the word.

Allow the Holy Ghost to have full scope and free course in testifying to you now. Give the Spirit his own place; let him follow out his own plan. What

plan? you ask. Ah! is he not already giving you some hint of his plan? He would have you let him keep hold of you, when he has begun to deal with you—to deal with your conscience in the way of conviction—with your heart in the way of persuasion. Does Felix tremble? Is Agrippa almost persuaded? The Spirit is testifying of Christ. Are you beginning to suspect that there may be more in the gospel than you once thought; that you may require to go deeper into religion; that the vague kind of confidence you have been cherishing, and the loose sort of piety you have been cultivating, will scarcely suffice much longer; that you need something more distinct,—a more thorough search into what is the real state of the case as between your God and you—a more thorough settlement of the footing on which you are to be with him—a far more thoroughly decided walk? Have you misgivings now as to those generalities in doctrine and those formalities in duty which used to content you? Do not doubt that the Spirit is testifying to you of Christ, and do not resist or grieve him. Let him carry on his own work in his own way—the way in which he has already begun it. And he will soon make you right glad to welcome Jesus Christ “coming by water and blood;” having in himself and in his cross precious blood to atone for all guilt, as well as pure water to cleanse from all pollution.

2. You may lean to the water as bearing witness—rather than to the blood. The influence of the gospel in purifying the heart and life may be that feature by which mainly it approves itself to your mind. You

recognise the necessity of being renewed to holiness or virtue, and therefore you can apprehend and appreciate the testimony of the water by which Jesus Christ came;—his requiring and providing for that result. But this purifying virtue in Christ, or in the gospel of Christ, you view very much apart from his blood of atonement—so that the change of heart towards God becomes to you, not only the chief part, but almost the whole of personal religion. You may not set altogether aside the blood; but practically you may be placing little reliance upon it and feeling little need of it. In that case, you set little value on the testimony of the blood; to the water and the Spirit you give all the preference.

Then, let me say again, give these two witnesses fair scope; let their testimony be fully carried out. In other words, follow out your own convictions. You see now in some degree, and feel, what alone can satisfy your God; what he is really entitled to claim and to expect at your hands. The law has come home to you—to your conscience and heart—in the full extent of its obligations, as binding you to perfect love, and making even a sin of thought exceeding sinful. That law approves itself as infinitely excellent; altogether reasonable; “holy, and just, and good.” You perceive now that to this law you must become willingly subject, that you must be brought into that state in which it shall be your meat to do the will of God, even as it was Christ’s. Under these impressions, having now a vivid perception of what holiness really is, you may set about being holy, in right earnest and with all your might.

Do you succeed? Nay, the very effort defeats itself; the struggle sinks you deeper in conscious guilt, and helpless subjection to the evil that is in you. The corruption of your nature is provoked and stimulated; you feel yourself paralysed, enchained, imprisoned. And while this new discovery of the "desperate wickedness of the heart,"—this sad proof that you are so very far from being what God would have you to be,—grieves you to the quick, the distress is aggravated by the consciousness of utter inability, the bitter impression that it is almost useless to think of being godly at all. For in this state even the assurance of the Spirit's supernatural aid avails you nothing. It is not help in obeying that you need; the very principle of obedience is wanting, and it seems hopeless to think of ever attaining it.

Hopeless, except only in one direction. Let the Spirit not only undertake to assist you, as with purifying water, in your work of holiness; but let him also, and first of all, bear witness to Christ as coming not by purifying water only, but also by atoning blood. Let the blood itself give testimony; and your case is precisely met. For what is it that lies at the bottom of such experience as Paul describes in the passage of his writings to which I have been alluding? (Rom. vii.) Is it not the unsettled controversy between your God and you? But the precious blood of Jesus—his perfect obedience unto death—meets your case. It furnishes the very element you need; for it furnishes the element of instant and complete reconciliation to your God. It cancels your guilt; it sets you free from condemnation;

it seals your peace. And now the heart, so crushed and depressed before, springs up as with elastic rebound, and wings its eagle flight to heaven, while the feet run in the way of God's commandments.

3. In another manner, the reverse of the former, this blessed harmony of the divine testimony may be disturbed. Instead of a preference for the water apart from the blood, there may be a leaning to the blood, to the omission of the water ; as if Christ came not both by water and by blood, but by blood only. The idea of an expiation of guilt may commend itself to the minds of conscious offenders, who feel their sin and fear the wrath of God. They may welcome the blood which testifies of sin atoned for, and God pacified and reconciled. They may be inclined to acquiesce in the testimony of the spirit and the blood, as if the gospel were intended simply to pacify the troubled conscience and set sinful men at their ease.

But here again, I say as before—Give heed fairly to the testimony of the Spirit and the blood ; and it will be found to require for its completion the testimony of the water. You are open to the impression of the blood ; you see and feel the reasonableness and the reality of the atonement made by blood for your sin. But if the Spirit is at all bearing witness with the blood, it must be a spiritual view of the necessity and the meaning of that atonement that he is causing you to take. You cannot, if the Spirit is witnessing along with it, regard it as an expedient for soothing the personally vindictive feelings of an offended God, and purchasing his indul-

gence for your frailties ; a mere provision for averting judgment and giving you security and quiet. No. You take a spiritual view of the shedding of the blood of Christ—as on the one hand vindicating the righteousness and manifesting the love of God ; and on the other hand laying a foundation for a holy and loving walk with him. The blood, if you rightly receive its testimony along with that of the Spirit, speaks, not of God weakly persuaded to be indulgent and sinners allowed to escape unpunished ; but of God righteously justifying believing men, and on the footing of a righteous justification freely restoring them to his favour. Its very end is to bring men near to God ; and so far from setting them free from the obligation of being washed, this is its highest value, that it secures their being “washed,” so as to be “sanctified as well as justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”

Thus in these three instances it may be seen that every attempt to give undue prominence to one of the witnesses, to the comparative slighting of the others, necessarily implies an unfair treatment of the testimony even of the very witness that is preferred. If the Spirit alone is viewed as bearing witness,—then his testimony is frittered down till it is nothing more than a sort of vague intimation of there being a revelation and a plan of salvation, without any distinct reference either to what the revelation contains or to what the plan of salvation is. If again the water is selected, and the sanctifying and purifying virtue of the gospel is chiefly commended,—there is danger lest a low standard of

holiness be set up, such as may be consistent with a conscience still unpacified and a heart still unreconciled. And if, once more, the blood is the witness on whose testimony we dwell,—we are led to misconceive altogether both the design and the efficacy of the atonement; making it a mere scheme of accommodation, instead of a glorious plan for upholding the divine righteousness and more than restoring the primeval dignity of man. “There are three that bear witness;” and it is only when all the three are received with equal faith, that they are found to “agree in one.”

4. But there is one other case to which I must briefly advert. The water and the blood may be received as bearing witness, without a due regard to the testimony of the living Spirit. The gospel may be understood in its full and comprehensive import, and may approve itself to the conscience and the heart. Christ may be known as coming both by water and by blood; the minister alike of renewal and of redemption; of purifying as well as of pardoning grace. But what, you ask, what is all that to me? Christ is set forth crucified before you, and from him all blessings freely flow. The plan of saving mercy, as it comes from heaven is complete; Christ coming both by water and blood is the very Saviour you need. But you have difficulty about his really saving you; about the application of his complete salvation to you; about your want of faith to lay hold of him and of it.

Beware here of the temptation of the spirit of evil; receive rather the testimony of the Spirit of truth. These

thoughts and misgivings,—so dishonourable to God, whose purpose of free love they impede—so injurious to you, whose return to God they arrest,—are from the father of lies. Resist them, as of the devil ; for they are false as he is himself. He may give them some air of plausibility, in order that if possible he may confuse more and more the question of your relation to God and the footing on which you are to be with God, so as to make you give up the care of your salvation as hopeless. But you must see that they are contrary to the plain testimony of the water and the blood ; for surely these witnesses,—the water and the blood,—do most emphatically speak to you of the fulness of God's grace, and the ample foundation he has laid at once for your peace and for your holiness.

And even when you are tempted to yield to the surmises of Satan, are you not conscious of other thoughts ? Is it not sometimes borne in upon your mind that this hesitating and halting unbelief is but an unworthy way of meeting such overtures as God is making, and that you might at least make the trial, and venture your soul on his faithful promises ?

It is the Spirit that thus bears witness ; and “the Spirit is truth.” Put the matter to an experimental test ; commit yourself to Christ, of whom the Spirit testifies, as having water from his smitten side to wash, and blood—precious blood—to take away all guilt. For it is in this way of actual trial that you will have the witness of the Spirit, which is the witness of God. In the peace which flows from the settlement of his contro-

versy with you and your justification in his sight ; in the glad relief which a simple acceptance of his mercy imparts ; in the sense of his love shed abroad in your hearts ; in the growing clearness of your views of his character, and the growing enlargement and elevation of your soul for his service ; in the laying aside of all reserve on your part, as all reserve is laid aside on his ; in the entrusting of your whole way—in darkness and distress—to him, and the surrender of your whole soul and body and spirit into his hands ;—you will understand, with increasing clearness, the consenting testimony of the three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood. And through faith in that testimony you will overcome the world. For no commandment of God will ever be grievous to you, if it comes to you in the power of the Spirit, and through the double channel of the water and the blood.

XXXIX.

THE WITNESS OR TESTIMONY OF GOD TO AND IN
BELIEVERS.

“If we receive the witness [testimony] of men, the witness [testimony] of God is greater : for this is the witness [testimony] of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness [testimony] in himself : he that believeth not God hath made him a liar ; because he believeth not the record [testimony] that God gave [hath testified] of his Son.”—1 JOHN v. 9, 10.*

THE question is still about faith ; the faith which is the victory that overcometh the world (ver. 4, 5). For that is the particular function here ascribed to faith ; that is the light in which faith is to be regarded. Doubtless, gospel faith is the same, in whatever light, and with reference to whatever function, it is contemplated ; it has always the same object, and the same ground or warrant. But the manner of its exercise may not be the same. And therefore it is to be noted that it is not faith as justifying ; nor faith simply as working generally by love ; but faith specially as overcoming the world ; that is spoken of in this passage. It is as “the victory that overcometh the world,” that faith is commended or extolled.

* It is much to be regretted that in these verses our Translators should have so unwarrantably, and to the utter obscuring of the sense, sacrificed exactness to variety ; using four different English words for one and the same verb, with its cognate noun, in the original Greek.

This faith rests on testimony ; as all faith must do. And the testimony on which it rests is sufficient to sustain it ; for it is divine :—" If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater : for this is the testimony of God which he hath testified of his Son" (ver. 9). Human testimony is a trustworthy ground of faith ; we rely on it every day, and act accordingly. That is assumed as admitted. But we have what is far better and stronger than human testimony ; we have "the testimony of God." Men are fallible and frail ; the Psalmist "said in his haste, All men are liars." Still we receive their testimony ; and we cannot help it ; we must come to a dead-lock or stand-still, if we do not. How much more confidently may we receive the testimony of him who can neither deceive nor be deceived ; who knows all things and is truth itself. To reject his testimony, and refuse to proceed on the faith of it, while we receive and act upon the testimony of men, is inconsistency and utter folly.

But what is the testimony of God, and how is it given ?

First, what is his testimony ? That is not expressly stated in this verse ; it is left to be inferred. But it is not difficult to say what it is ; whether we look back on the preceding context or forwards to that which follows. Of course, it is the preceding context that must chiefly guide us ; but the two very much agree. As it stands in the preceding context, it is that "Jesus Christ is the Son of God, coming by water and blood." As it stands in the following context, it is that "God hath given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son."

Secondly, How is his testimony given? As to that, this ninth verse says nothing. But it plainly connects the preceding and following contexts. John evidently means to say that he has been describing, and that he is going on to describe still further, this testifying, on God's part, of his Son, with special reference to the manner of it.

For he draws at this point a broad line of distinction. In what goes before, he has been speaking of God's testimony from without, or to us; in what follows, he is to speak of God's testimony within, or in us. It is the testimony of God in both cases; his bearing witness of his Son; and it is to be received as such. But whereas it has been put in the former passage as operating on us,—it is now to be put as ascertained, apprehended, and felt, by us and in us:—"He that believeth on the Son of God hath the testimony in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the testimony that God hath testified of," or about, "his Son" (ver. 10).

"He that believeth on the Son of God hath the testimony in himself"; the testimony, that is, of God; for it is upon the warrant of "the testimony of God which he has testified about his Son," that he believes on the Son of God. But in his so believing, that testimony of God becomes to him a matter of inward consciousness. He has it within him; in himself. It is not now merely God testifying to us of his Son, but God testifying in us of his Son; causing us to know experimentally the truth of what he testifies. We find, by

actual trial and experience, that the Son is exactly what the Father has been testifying him to be : "the Son of God, Jesus Christ, coming by water and blood." Thus the inward verifies the outward.

It is as if a friend should introduce to me his son, with a high testimony to his personal excellency and rank, as well as to his power and willingness to assist me in an emergency, and be of service to me all my days. I believe the testimony, and on the faith of it welcome the new-comer to my home and heart. He soon approves himself to me as all that his father said I would find him to be. Then I have the testimony in a sense, in me, in myself. So far the analogy may hold and be helpful. But, like all earthly analogies of what is divine, it is imperfect. It is only in a sense somewhat vague and loose that, in the case supposed, I can be said to have the testimony of my friend about his son in me. For it is not really my friend testifying in me, as something distinct from his testifying to me ; it is I myself who am proving and verifying his testimony. In this case, also, it is that, no doubt ; that at least. But is it not something more ? For the testifier is God ; and he of whom he testifies is his own Son. Literally, therefore, and in the strictest and fullest sense, I can have God's testimony in me ; I can have God himself testifying in me. And I can have him testifying in me, not of his Son offered and given to me, as "coming by water and by blood ;" but of his Son, so coming by water and by blood, and now dwelling in my heart ; "Christ in me, the hope of glory." This is something quite different

from our own consciousness apprehending the truth, and feeling the reality, of what God testifies of his Son. It is rather like what Paul indicates when he says : "The Spirit itself beareth witness," or testifies, "with our Spirit, that we are the children of God : and if children, then heirs ; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ : if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together."

An indispensable condition of this inward testifying of God in us,—our having in us his testimony,—is our believing on his Son :—"He that believeth on the Son of God," and he alone, "hath the testimony in himself." Evidently it must be so. For it is our believing on his Son that brings God into these hearts of ours, in which he is to testify of his Son in us more and more. And just as evidently, this believing on his Son, which thus leads to our having the testimony within us, must rest on the testimony from without. It is our believing on his Son, on the ground and warrant of his testifying to us of his Son, that opens the way for our having him testifying in us of his Son. And so we are brought back to this, that we are to believe on the Son of God, not because God testifies of him in us, but because he testifies of him to us. Is not that, however, warrant enough ? Is it not sufficient of itself to win faith the most confiding, since it is the testimony of him who is the truth ? Does it not make unbelief inexcusable ? For refusing to believe, on the strength of the outward testimony alone, even without the inward, is simply giving God the lie :—"He that believeth not God hath made

him a liar ; because he believeth not the testimony that God hath testified of his Son."

Thus, I. The ground and reward or fruit of faith ; and II. The sin of unbelief ; are to be viewed in the light of its being God's testimony and not man's that is to be believed.

I. Faith stands here between two divine testimonies, or two modes of the one divine testimony ; it is the effect of the first, and the cause or means of the second.

In the first place, as an effect, faith flows from the threefold testimony of "the Spirit, the water, and the blood ;" which is the primary testimony of God, from without or from above. You who believe on the Son of God believe on him as witnessed or attested by God ; you believe on him because it is really God who has testified or testifies of him. And the testimony of God, upon which you believe on him, is substantially of the same sort as the testimony of men, to which you are accustomed to give credit. That is implied in what is said : "If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater." For it is indeed the testimony of God that you are to receive,—“the testimony which he hath testified of his Son.” It is testimony to you ; not in you. It may be in some sense and to some extent in you, in so far as it enlists on its behalf, or is fitted to enlist, your inward convictions, tastes, and tendencies. But as long as it is testimony, not received and admitted, but claiming to be received and admitted, it is testimony to you. And it is upon that testimony that your faith must lay hold and lean.

I have said that this testimony of God to you may, in some sense and to some extent, be in you ;—it may be testimony appealing to certain inward instincts or principles of your nature. It is so in the present instance. For in fact, the testimony of God as to his Son which is here compared with the testimony of men, and preferred to it, is altogether and exclusively of an internal nature ; it is God dealing with your whole inner man, through the threefold testimony of the Spirit, the water, and the blood. There is no reference to what are called the external evidences of Christianity ; the historical proofs of the gospel. The Spirit, the water, and the blood, are not represented as testifying through the medium of outward events or signs ; authenticated, as these usually are, by the evidence,—not of mere tradition, transmitting hearsay at second hand,—but of competent witnesses, leaving on record what they actually saw and heard. That would be the testimony of men. We have that,—God be praised we have it most abundantly ;—and we do well to receive it, and on the strength of it to accept the Bible as a divine revelation and the Gospel as a divine message. But the testimony of God is greater ; not only because it is the testimony of God and not of men, but because, being his, it adapts and addresses itself to the inner man in us ; to the whole inner man ; to all our sensibilities and susceptibilities of conscience, emotion, will.

For in this testifying or witness-bearing, the Spirit, having the water and the blood associated with him, makes a direct appeal to the moral sense and feeling within us. He

does so altogether apart from all the logical arguments and historical demonstrations which may be brought to confirm our belief in Christianity. These are valuable in their place. But the direct and immediate testimony of God, in the threefold witness-bearing of the Spirit, the water, and the blood, is largely independent and irrespective of them. It is a very straightforward dealing of the Spirit with us; of the Spirit testifying along with, and by means of, the water and the blood. It is the Spirit pressing home upon us Christ; making us feel our need of Christ; showing us Christ's suitableness and sufficiency for us. In particular, it is the Spirit bringing near to us Jesus, as the Son of God, eager to make us one with him in his sonship, and for that very end coming by water and blood; so that neither sin's defilement nor sin's condemnation may stand in the way of our being partakers of his filial relation to the Father. He is come by water to purify, and by blood to atone, that we may be sons of God in him. That is the testimony of God to us, here and now. Is it not so? Who is there among us to whom the Spirit is not thus, more or less sensibly, bearing witness along with the water and the blood, here and now?

Ah! let me assume that I address some spiritually awakened and spiritually exercised soul. Has your sin, brother, found you out? Is the Spirit convincing you of its exceeding sinfulness? Are you in earnest longing for purity and peace? Have you been made to feel that you do really need for your Saviour one who can place you on a very different footing with your God and

Father in heaven from that on which you naturally are, and create in you very different dispositions towards him from those which you naturally cherish? And is there dawning upon you more and more brightly, the apprehension that Jesus, as God's own Son, coming by water and by blood, is just such a Saviour, and that if he were but yours all would be well? Is not this the testimony of God to you, warranting and requiring you to believe on his Son, so coming, as really yours,—“loving you and giving himself for you?” Is it not far greater and better than any human testimony? What need have you of my assurance, or any man's assurance, to build your faith on? Here is God's threefold testimony; the Spirit commending to you, all vile and guilty as you are, God's own Son as come by water and by blood, to sanctify and save. Having this testimony, you may well “believe on the Son of God.” Yes. “Believing because of the Lord's own word,” approving itself to your spiritually quickened soul, you may say, as the Samaritans said to the woman, “Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world?”

And now, secondly, thus believing, you may look for a new and additional testimony of God; not to you, but most truly and fully in you. For this simple honest faith, the effect or fruit of one mode of the divine testimony, becomes the cause or means of another. That other is not outward at all, but altogether inward; not to you, but in you:—“He that believeth on the Son of God hath the testimony in himself.”

Understand well, and keep ever in mind, that having the testimony of God in you is not the preliminary to your believing on the Son of God, but the result or consequence of your doing so. Do not imagine that you are to have any knowledge or experience of this inward testimony of God before you believe on his Son ; as if it were to be a ground of your believing, or a help to your believing. It is a sort of knowledge or experience which can never go before faith, but must always follow it. For, in truth, it is nothing more than faith in exercise ; faith unfolding and developing its energy ; faith acting out its purpose ; faith realising more and more its object and itself.

In fact, as to its substance, this testimony of God in you is identically the same as his testimony to you. It is the same threefold testimony of the Spirit, the water, and the blood. Only now the Spirit has won for himself, and for the water and the blood, a place within your consciousness ; deep down in your inmost soul, as no longer merely appealed to and assailed by this testimony, but cordially acquiescing in it. That, however, makes a vast difference indeed. It is the difference between Christ "standing at the door and knocking," and Christ, "when you hear his voice and open to him, coming in to sup with you and you with him." The testimony is the same ; the testifiers are the same. But your believing acquiescence, I repeat, makes all the difference. The testifiers, the Spirit, the water, and the blood,—are now, all three of them, in you ; witnessing not to, but from, the far back recess of your willing mind and con-

senting heart. Their testimony,—which is God's, and therefore far better than man's,—is in you now ; not as a stream forcing its way, as it were, into the depths of your spiritual experience ; but as “a well of water” divinely opened in these depths, and “springing up into everlasting life.”

For the real and blessed explanation of the whole matter is simple enough. He to whom the threefold testimony of the Spirit, the water, and the blood relates, is himself in you now ; not given to you, with ample warrant for your embracing him ; but in you, as embraced by you ; in you, as the very Son of God, coming by water and blood. Thus, believing on the Son of God, you have the testimony of God in you. The Spirit is testifying in you, with the water and the blood ; not now in order to win your assent and consent, but with your assent and consent already won. And that being so, there is no limit to the gracious assurance and enlargement to be looked for from your thus having the testimony of God in you. For now, not only your conviction, but your cordial choice also, goes along with the divine testimony, and is all in the line of it. You make full proof of it ; or rather you suffer the Spirit himself to make full proof of it in you. He does so by “taking of what is Christ's and showing it more and more to you.” He gives you an ever-increasing clearness and intensity of insight into Jesus being the Son of God ; and into his coming, as the Christ, by water and blood. So believing, you have the testimony in yourselves ; God testifying in you by the Spirit, the

water, and the blood ;—the Spirit testifying in you of the Son of God coming by water and by blood.

Let me ask you, in all faithfulness, do you believe in the Son of God, on God's own testimony to you about him and not man's ? Then, what do you know of this testimony of God in you ? "It is the spirit that testifieth." What do you know of his testifying, not merely in his striving with you, but in his dwelling in you, and revealing in you God's own Son, Jesus Christ, coming by water and blood ? What, first, of the blood by which he comes ? Is God by his Spirit giving you,—not only a sight of your need of it as a sinner, and its sufficiency for you as for all sinners,—but a sense of its actual efficacy in your case, as bringing you personally near to God, on the footing of your personal guilt being atoned for, and yourselves being personally reconciled ? What, secondly, of the water, by which, as well as by blood, he comes ? Is God by his Spirit giving you real personal experience of Christ's being the purifier and sanctifier, in your being "holy, as he is holy ?" What, thirdly, of the sonship, of its being God's own Son who comes by water and by blood ? Is God by his Spirit giving you an apprehension of your adoption as sons, and moving you to cry, as sons, Abba, Father ?

These, unquestionably, are the three kinds of experience in the line of which your having the testimony of God in you will make itself known and felt. And if you believe on the Son of God, you will have some growing practical acquaintance with all the three. The blood ;—does it really first pierce and then pacify your

conscience—pierce and pacify it evermore, constantly, day by day, more and more every day? The fountain filled with that blood ;—do you bathe your guilty souls in it every morning, every night? Do you feel it ever opening your wounds more painfully, and more sensibly pouring itself, as oil and balm, into the very wounds it opens? The water ;—are you consciously coming more and more under its power? Is the holiness of Christ filling your soul, fixing your eye, drawing your heart? Is your loathing of sin growing more intense? Do you welcome and value Christ as the minister of purity, even more than as the minister of peace, and rejoice in his blood purging your conscience from dead works, mainly because it thus sets you free to serve the living God? The sonship of him who comes by water and blood ;—are you entering into that? He is come by water and by blood, not only to make you one with himself in his atoning death and in his holy life, but to make you sons of God in him. Are you realising that? Are you entering into the position which, as the Son of God, he occupies ; and into his mind and heart, as the Son of God? Thus, and only thus, “ he that believeth on the Son of God hath the testimony in himself.”

II. Over against the power or virtue or efficacy of faith, turning God’s testimony to us into his testimony in us, John places in very emphatic contrast the exceeding sinfulness of the sin of unbelief: “ He that believeth not God hath made him a liar.” The two opposite ways of dealing with the testimony of God are here sharply distinguished. Either you believe his testi-

mony to you, and so honour him that he himself gives you an inward, experimental confirmation of it ; you taste and see that God is good ; you prove him, and see if he does not open the windows of heaven and pour down on you a blessing ; you open your mouth wide and he fills it ; giving you peace of conscience, purity of heart, filial liberty, enlargement, assurance, love. Or else, you disbelieve his testimony, and so, by your unbelief, not only hinder him from testifying in you, but dishonour him by virtually giving him the lie when he testifies to you.

And let it be well observed that it is the very same testimony of God to you in both cases, whether you receive it or disbelieve it. You may not shelter your unbelief under the excuse or apology that you have not proof or evidence enough. In particular, you may not plead that you have not the inward testimony. Neither had we, when we believed, may be the reply of those who deal otherwise than you deal with the testimony from without and from above. You have the same ground or warrant for believing that we had ; the sure word of the true and faithful God. We were not asked to believe on the ground and warrant of any inward testimony of God in us ; any witnessing of the Spirit with our spirits to our being the sons of God. It was not as being the sons of God ; it was not as having any title to be the sons of God, or any consciousness of our being the sons of God ; that we believed. It was simply as hearing the word or testimony of God, commending to us powerfully and persuasively, by his

Spirit, Jesus Christ his Son coming by water and blood ; coming to save, with a complete and full salvation, sinners,—and of sinners us, the chief. That was all that our faith had to grasp ; all that it had to lay hold of and lean on. We found it sufficient ; we tested it, and it has stood the test. Why should not you ? Why should you wait for anything else, or anything more ? We had not any inward sign, we had not any inward experience, on which to build our belief. We had simply God speaking to us ; to our understandings, our consciences, our hearts ; testifying to us concerning our sin, and the sufficiency for us of his Son, coming by water and by blood to save. You have the same. You have all that we had. You have God, in his Son whom he sent to be the propitiation for your sins ; you have God, in his Son coming by water and by blood ; you have God, in his Son to whom he points, hanging on the cross, pierced by you, while out of his side come water and blood to wash and heal you ; you have God, in his Son thus set forth crucified before your eyes ; you have this God thus testifying to you ; assuring you ; swearing to you ;—and beseeching you—oh ! how importunately and affectionately !—to give him credit when he testifies to you, and assures you, and swears to you :—“ As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked ; but that the wicked turn from his wickedness and live : turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways ; for why will ye die, O house of Israel ? ”

Will you still refuse to give him credit ? Will you still dare to question his sincerity, his being in earnest,

when he thus pleads with you? Will you not believe that he means what he says, when he tells you that, in his Son coming by water and by blood, he is waiting to be gracious? Do him not so great injustice as to treat him in a way in which you would not venture to treat an honourable man. You receive the testimony of such a man. Is not the testimony of God greater? Is he not entitled to be believed on his simple word, much more on his solemn oath? Is he not one whom you can trust, so far at least as to make trial of his faithfulness? Ah! let there be an end of doubt, hesitancy, halting, delay. All that is most insulting to him; for it is really making him a liar. Do not commit so great a sin; do not shut your eyes to its greatness. Consider well how it is not with mere facts of history or the dead letter of books of evidence that you are dealing, but with the true and living God himself. Alleged facts you might question, books of evidence you might criticise, without offence to the recorders of the facts or the writers of the books. But here is God, the God of truth, commending to you his Son from heaven, and summoning you, on the warrant and assurance of his truth, to believe on his Son. Your refusal to do so is a personal affront; it cannot but be construed as giving him the lie,—“making him a liar.”

XL.

THE SUBSTANCE OF THE TESTIMONY—ETERNAL
LIFE GOD'S GIFT IN HIS SON.

“And this is the record [testimony], that God hath given to us eternal life ; and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life ; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.”—1 JOHN v. 11, 12.

THESE two verses close what John has to say about the faith which overcometh the world, and they explain and apply the statement “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the testimony in himself” (ver. 10). It is the testimony of God that the believer has in himself ; but he has it as not now God testifying to him, but God testifying in him. It is no longer objective and outward merely ; it becomes subjective and inward. When it is believed or received, it enters into, and, as it were, passes through the receiving mind ; effects a lodgment for itself behind, far back, deep down, in the innermost soul ; and makes itself known and felt there, not as an external fact or proposition, but as an internal power or principle of activity. But what is it that gives this testimony of God its ability so to change its position ? Is it not its having in it, not truth merely, but life ? It is not mere truth-telling, it is life-giving also ;—for “this is the testimony, that God hath given to us eternal life, and

this life is in his Son" (ver. 11). Therefore the receiving of it is not merely being convinced, as by evidence or authority from without or from above, but being quickened by a mighty agency and influence within. It is, in short, not merely truth admitted into the inner man, but life communicated to the inner man. It must therefore be inward; intimately and intensely inward;—"He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (ver. 12).

The testimony of God is first, that he bestows on us life as a gift; "he hath given to us eternal life;" and then secondly, that "this life is in his Son." He gives us therefore this eternal life when he gives us his Son.

Consider in what sense and manner this eternal life is in his Son. It is in him, as being possessed by him as his own; he has it in himself. In his incarnate state he has it thus; not as God only, but as man also, as "Jesus Christ come in the flesh." Let us hear his own words: "As the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself" (John v. 26). That cannot surely be the life which, as the Son of God, he has from everlasting. It must be life belonging to him as man; life of which his human nature, as well as his divine nature, is capable. And yet it is strangely identified with the Father's own life. It is connected with it and compared to it. And it is connected with it and compared to it, in respect of what might be thought to be the highest and most peculiar property of the everlasting God, his incommunicable attribute of self-existence.

What can this mean? Is it really self-existence

that our Lord claims for himself as "the man Christ Jesus,"—for his manhood as well as his Godhead? That can scarcely be his meaning; for he speaks of this life as derived. It is not his originally, like the life which he has with the Father and the Holy Ghost from everlasting to everlasting. It is his by the Father's gift. It is life having necessarily, in that view, a beginning, though it may know no end. It is not therefore self-existence; it cannot be. And yet it must be something not quite unlike that manner of life which self-existence implies, and not far from being akin to it.

For the statement respecting the Father himself, that he hath "life in himself," may have reference here, not to the abstract nature of his life as being underived and self-subsistent, but rather to the manner of its exercise. The Father lives, not simply as existing; but as existing ever consciously and actively, realising and enjoying existence, if one may dare to say so; thinking, feeling, doing. His life is thought, feeling, action. And what, under that aspect of it, must be held to be one chief characteristic of his life? What but this—that he does not adapt himself to things without, or draw from things without the grounds and reasons of his procedure; of his thinking, feeling, acting, in any case or instance, thus and not otherwise; that these are always found within his own holy mind and heart; that so he "has his life in himself?" Is not that, in truth, the perfection of the Father's "eternal life?" Is it not thus that it is essentially eternal? It is not moved or moulded by what is "seen and temporal." It is determined by his own indwelling purpose, which is "unseen and eternal."

But, it may be asked, is any creature capable of a life like that? Can any creature, in that sense, have life in himself? Not certainly as a creature living apart from the Creator, or separate from the Creator. Assuredly fallen man has no such life. He does not live a life that is independent, as to its ongoing, of things without. Is he not, on the contrary, in large measure the creature and the child of circumstances? What, in fact, is his life but a struggle to accommodate himself to the state of matters that he finds pressing upon him, all around him, in the world? Selfish he may be to the heart's core; consulting only for his own ease and pleasure. Or, in his philosophy, he may affect to rise above external influences, to bid defiance to all foreign forces, and consult no will but his own. It is all in vain. With all his selfishness, and all his philosophy, he cannot shake himself free from subjection to things seen and temporal. He cannot be, in that respect, "as God." It would not be good for him if he could; not at least unless he was so united and allied to God as to be really and thoroughly one in mind and heart with God.

But was not that the case with the Son of God on the earth, "the man Christ Jesus?" He was united and allied to God as no other man ever was or could be. In him the human nature was perfectly one in character with the divine. He therefore, while living always as self-moved and self-regulated,—altogether independently of things without,—never could live otherwise than as the Father liveth. Therefore it was possible for him, as Son of man as well as Son of God, to have "life in him-

self" by the Father's gift, exactly as "the Father hath life in himself."

Look at Jesus Christ come in the flesh ; the Father's own Son given to be the Saviour of the world. What was his life ? Was it not all from within ? He was not insensible to things without ; they deeply and powerfully affected him ; he felt them keenly. But his life ; his real life ; the life he lived by purpose and determination, —by ultimate choice of will ; was not outwardly dictated, but inwardly originated. He had it in himself. Take a testing instance,—his saying, "Not my will, but thine be done." "My will !" That was the effect of an impression from without ; it was the outer world and its prince pressing him very closely ; it was the horror of the cross brought to bear upon him very vehemently. And he had in him sensibilities and susceptibilities that laid his inner man very open to the pressure. His very holiness, his holy love to God and holy hatred of sin, made the thought of his being forsaken of God and enduring the penal curse inconceivably terrible. "Father, let the cup pass," is what his will would be if it were moved from without. But no. Even in his worst straits he will not yield altogether,—he will not yield at all,—to his will being moved from without. He will give utterance indeed to what his will as so moved would be, if he were to yield to it. Thanks that for our sakes he does so ! But it is not as if he were yielding to it. "If it be possible" is still the qualification. And then he falls back upon his real inmost self ; his real inner life :—"Nevertheless, Father, not my will, but thine be done."

That is surely something like "having life in himself;" having power to pass over, or pass through, the will which outward circumstances of suffering or temptation would prompt; to get far back, far down, within; and to find and feel there an inward impulse overbearing the impression from without and moving the real inward choice;—"Not my will, but thine be done."

Is this "eternal life?" Is it "the eternal life which is in the Son?" Is it the power, or privilege, or prerogative of living from within himself, because it is living from within the Father, in whose bosom he dwells; from within the Father's nature, with which his own is always in harmony; from within the Father's will, to which his own is always thoroughly conformed? It is a life quite compatible with the obligation of subjection to authoritative rule or law; and that too in the utmost severity of penal infliction, as well as in the strictest bond of holy requirement. It was so in Jesus as "made under the law." He still had this life in himself, even when he took our death as his own. If it had not been so;—if his life had been not from within but from without;—if he had been one who lived according to the stress and strain of the external world;—he never would have taken our death as his own. But "having life in himself," as one with the Father, he "finished the work which the Father gave him to do."

Now therefore, in an eminent and blessed sense, this life is in the Son for us. There is in him for us such a life as even the death of criminality and condemnation which for us he takes as his own cannot destroy. It

would be ruin to us,—that death ; but it is not ruin to him. If the sentence takes effect upon us, it is without our choice, and against our consent ; we cannot walk up to it as “having life in ourselves,” or as moved from within ourselves to bear it, as the Father is necessarily moved from within himself to inflict it. But Jesus can, and does (John x. 17, 18). Even in dying for us he has therefore “life in himself.” “Eternal life is thus in the Son” as “sent by the Father to be the propitiation for our sins.”

And this life is something more than his surviving the endurance of our death. It is a living apprehension and appropriation for us of the Father's life. For it is “as the Father hath life in himself, that he,” on our behalf and as our head and representative, “has life in himself.” In that capacity he shares the Father's life ; his manner of living is the same as the Father's. It is not a life of shifts and expedients ; a life contingent and conditional on the chances of time and tide ; a life of afterthoughts, altering the course to suit every current, —setting the sails to every change in the fickle wind. It is a calm, serene purpose ; working itself out steadily “without variableness or shadow of turning.” It is living for that for which God lives ; living therefore as God lives. Is not that the eternal life of which God testifies as being in his Son ? It is in his Son alone ; and in him inalienably. It is in him in such a sense that he cannot part with it or give it away. We do not receive this eternal life of God from his Son ; we share it with him. The Father's testimony is that the eternal life which he gives us is in his Son.

Here let me remind you that it is the Spirit who bears this testimony on the Father's behalf ; the Spirit, with the water and the blood by which Jesus Christ came. The Father's gift of eternal life to you is in his Son ; that is the testimony. And it is the Spirit that bears the testimony ; the Spirit who takes of what is Christ's and shows it to you ; the Spirit making you Christ's and Christ yours ; the Spirit making you partakers of Christ's own very life,—“the eternal life which is in the Son.” Because he lives, you live ; as he lives, you live. In him the Father gave, has given, and is giving you, “eternal life ;” life that, in and with Christ, can undergo and survive the death of guilt and wrath ; life that, in and with Christ, can in a sense become identical in character with God's own life ; sharing, in a measure, its inward, self-moving energy, and its independence of things without. For that, and nothing short of that, is the eternal life that he gives ; the life that is in his Son. So he is testifying to us ;—testifying to us by his Spirit ;—by his Spirit striving with us, and shutting us up into Christ. This eternal life in his Son is his gift to us ; already bestowed ; assured to us by his own testimony ; awaiting our acceptance ; ours if we will but have it to be ours,—if we will have him in whom it is ours.

Therefore “he that hath the Son hath life.” If only he has the Son, he has the very life which is in the Son. Thus the way is made plain and simple ; God the Father has made it so. Very wonderfully has he made it so. The end is very high. It is our living as God lives. It

is our living as God lives, from within ; not as acted upon, but as acting ; and that from some inward motive, or impulse, or principle, common to both, to God and to us. And the common motive or impulse or principle,—that which is common to God and to us as regards this eternal life,—what is it? Is it not Christ? Is it not Christ having in him this life? God in Christ ; we in Christ ;—is it not thus that God and we meet in a common life?

1. Hence, in the first place, an essential preliminary or condition of this life,—nay one chief part of it so far as we are concerned,—is the abolishing of death. No one can have this life ; a life self-possessed and self-contained, being a life God-possessed and God-contained ; who is not consciously and believingly right with himself, because right with God ; right in law and judgment ; on a right footing ; unimpeached and uncondemned. The conscience must be pacified and the heart reconciled. With a sense of sin upon the conscience and enmity in the heart, it is impossible for me to have anything like that free and independent life, in and with himself, which God means me to have, as his gift to me. If he is to give me that life of his, he must first give me deliverance from this death of mine,—from my conscious guilt and felt liability to wrath,—and the consequent dread, discomfort, and dislike, with which that life of his is wholly incompatible. And so he does ; for if I have the Son, I have life, in the sense and to the effect of complete and final deliverance from death. I pass from death to life.

2. But, secondly, the life to which I pass is something

more than the undoing of my death; the reversal of the sentence and destruction of the power of my death. It is a new endowment; it is the imparting to me of a new power, or privilege, or capacity; it is the accession or addition of a new faculty of life, over and above any I ever naturally possessed, or ever could have got for myself, even though the blight of sin's guilt and curse had never come upon me.

For he whom I have is the Son; and I have him, if I have him at all, as the Son. I have him, not merely as he is set before me in his relation to sinners, and to me, of sinners the chief; himself made sin for me and making me righteous in his righteousness. I must indeed first have him in that character and capacity. But I have him also as the Son, in his filial relation to the Father; as the Son to whom "the Father hath given to have life in himself." I speak not of what he was to the Father from before all worlds, in the past eternity, ere he came into this world: it is not the life he then had that the Father gives me. I speak of him as he has been since his incarnation, and as he will continue to be all through the eternity that is to come. When I have him, I have him thus; as he now is and ever will be. I have the Son; and in him I have the very life which the Father has given him.

And that life is "life eternal;" it is "having life in himself." It is having life in himself because it is having life in God his Father. For he and the Father are one; and their life is one. Whatever constitutes the Father's life; whatever the everlasting Father may

be said to live in, or to live for; that is the life of the Son. And it is the life which you have, if you have the Son. It is your having life in yourself. It is so most emphatically when it is viewed in contrast with any life you may be supposed, or may suppose yourself, to have when you have not the Son.

What is your life out of Christ? What is your life in your unconverted state; when you are unrenewed and unreconciled? Is it anything like your having life in yourselves? Is it independent of things without? Take it in any sense you choose. Take it secularly, as the life you live in the world. What keeps you alive, alert, interested;—not dull and drowsy, as you too often are, but lively? Is it an inherent inward principle of activity? Or are you conscious that you depend almost entirely on outward stimulants,—outward means of occupation or excitement,—outward events or news or company,—for what you can really reckon the life of the day; and that without these you flag and droop, and for the time are as good as dead? You can bestir yourself on occasion. You can be roused to sentimental interest or energetic exertion, bodily or mental, when some appliance from without is brought to bear upon you. But when you are left to yourself and your own inward resources, what stagnation is apt to come upon you! Or take the life you live religiously, in the sense of your trust and hope before God! What is it? What is it that ministers to your quiet and peace? Is it an indwelling and abiding assurance—an outgoing and outflowing affection? Or is it an observance of formal rites and a compliance

with devout customs? Is it as being alone with God, or is it as one of a company,—lost in a crowd or admitted into a coterie,—that you feel yourself to be safe enough and comfortable enough? Certainly, if you are out of Christ,—if you have not the Son,—your life, in either view of it, whatever real vitality you have, is contingent upon things without; bound up, more or less, with what passes away and is not eternal. For the world, the religious as well as the secular world, passes away; and any life to which it ministers must be fleeting and not eternal.

But now, if you have the Son, how different is your life! First and chiefly, in a spiritual sense, how is it that you now live? What is the seat, what the source, of your life; your confidence; your fellowship; your worship; your joy in God? Is it not Christ in you? Having him as the Son, you are complete in him. You have his life, the life which he has with God, communicated to you and shared with you. Your life, in the sense of your standing with God and your relation to God, is identical with his. Having the Son, you have the Son's life, as being sons yourselves. And now, therefore, the ruling, active, moving principle of your life is identical with his. You live for that for which he, as the Son, lived and lives. And what was, what is that? Not certainly anything out of himself, save only God. He lived here on earth, not for things external, any more than he lived by things external. He drew no inspiration from without himself. He owned no rule without or outside of himself. He said, "Lo, I come; to do thy will, O God. Yea

thy law is within my heart." He, being the Son, walked abroad as the Son on his Father's earth "having life in himself," because he lived with the Father and for the Father; the Father living in him and giving him without measure the Spirit. That was his life. And you have it as yours, if you have the Son himself as yours. You also walk abroad on this earth, which is your Father's, having your Father's love abiding in you, as it abode in him; receiving, as he did, the Spirit.

If then you realise your position,—if really and truly, consciously and constantly, you "have the Son;"—if you have him as yours, your own very portion and possession, yours now, to hold, to grasp, to identify with yourself;—if you thus have the Son and his sonship, what ought to be your port and bearing towards things without—"things seen and temporal?" Are you still to be the sport of circumstances, swayed to and fro by accidents, dependent on chances and contingencies, leaning on props that an hour may overthrow, fain to snatch a trembling joy from the brief and troubled sunshine of a wintry noon? Nay rather, having the Son, live as having in you "life eternal;" life that can defy the vicissitudes, as it will outlast the limits, of time; life standing, not in the world's or the church's fleeting forms, but in the favour, love, fellowship; in the law, commandments, ordinances; of the everlasting Father, "his Father and your Father, his God and your God."

Let a few words of practical application be allowed.

1. "He that hath the Son hath life;" he has this life, and no other. Hence a searching question:—Are you

willing upon that condition to have the Son ? You may be willing to have the Son, and along with him, and through him, some sort of life. You would have him as providing for you life, in the sense of mere safety from death ; securing your ultimate impunity in the day of judgment. But you cannot have him thus ; for “he that hath the Son hath life”—“eternal life” ; the life meant when it is said, “as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have in himself.” If you have the Son at all, you must have him in all the fulness of his filial oneness with the Father ; for that is his life : that alone is “life eternal.”

2. “He that hath not the Son of God hath not life ;” he has not this life. Eternal life, in a sense, he has—life without end ; and after death, life without change. Life also in himself it will then be in a very terrible sense : for then all external accessories and alleviations are gone ; the world is not. But the soul not having the Son is. It continues to exist, and that for ever. It lives, with nothing out of itself to lean on, or look to ! There is no congenial earthly system or sphere around to mitigate its pain ; no Saviour waiting to be gracious ; no Holy Spirit striving any more ! For him there is, and that for ever, eternal death, instead of eternal life. It must be so because he has not the Son.

3. Eternal life is the gift of God—his present gift ; his present gift to all—to all unreservedly—to all unconditionally. It is the life that is in his Son ; the life which his Son lives now, and lives for evermore. This, and nothing short of this, is God’s gift, It is a gift ; a

mere gift; a free gratuitous gift. It is not a prize; "the prize of your high calling of God in Christ." That is the consummation of this life; for which you have to wait and work,—to wrestle in the fight and run the race that is set before you. But the life itself, in the full sense of its being not only deliverance from the criminal's curse through the Son being made a curse for you, but also oneness with the Son, as in his atoning death and justifying resurrection, so also in his filial oneness with the Father,—this life is God's gift—his gift now; not to be waited for; not to be worked for; not to be paid for; but to be accepted and appropriated by faith alone. He gives freely this eternal life.

4. Still he gives it only as life in his Son. He cannot separate this life from his Son; it is so precious, so divine. It is a filial life, and therefore it is in his Son. And it cannot be otherwise. You must have the Son if you would have it. But is that a painful or an irksome condition? Is it any objection—can you feel it to be any objection—that God insists on giving you his Son? Not a boon—a benefit—a blessing through his Son, but that Son himself, his own very Son, Jesus whom he loveth? Would you indeed have it otherwise? Would you rather not have the Son himself, if only you could get the good of his coming between you and eternal death? Oh, be not so ungrateful! Refuse not to receive and embrace him whom the Father is bringing near to you now. Obey the Father's gracious command and call; "This is my beloved Son, hear him."

XII

ETERNAL LIFE CONNECTED WITH CONFIDENCE
IN PRAYER.

"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God ; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, [and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God]. And this is the confidence [boldness] that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us : and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him."—1 JOHN v. 13-15.*

THIS would seem to be the beginning of the end of the epistle. Whether the "these things" which "I have written unto you" are simply the things contained in the immediately preceding context, or must be held to reach further back, is not material. John is evidently summing up ; he is pointing his discourse or argument to its close. And he points it very clearly and cogently. He puts very strongly the final end he has in view. It is that you may "know" certain things. Over and over

* I incline to the opinion of those who reject the last clause of the 13th verse, "and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God." On the whole, the authority of manuscripts seems to be against it. The words come in, moreover, awkwardly, and with no real addition to the sense of the passage. And I can see how the introduction of them into certain manuscripts, through the fault of transcribers, is more easily accounted for than the omission of them from any manuscripts, if they had been genuine. That, as I think, is usually a good test.

again he uses that word "know;" not less than six or seven times in the course of about as many verses. The knowledge meant is evidently of a high order, in a spiritual point of view; not speculative and intellectual merely, but experimental and practical. It is not simply faith, although it is connected with faith, as flowing from it, and involved in it. Still it is something more than faith. It is, if one may say so, faith realised; faith proved inwardly or subjectively, by being acted out and acted upon outwardly or objectively; the believer ascertaining, by actual trial and experience, the truth and trustworthiness of his belief. It is not now with us—we think, we are persuaded, we hope; but "we know."

Now one thing which you are thus believingly to know is "that you have eternal life." And you are to know this, not in the way of a mere reflex ascertaining of it, but in the way of a direct acting of it out; for "this is the boldness that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." It is thus, in the actual use of it, that you are to know your having eternal life. In plain terms, the outgoing or forthcoming of our boldness, as having eternal life, is in prayer. Prayer is the exercise or expression of it; as it has been said before to be:—"Whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight" (iii. 22).

I. There is, however, as it might seem, a qualification here which is not there; "according to his will." What that means it is important to see. It cannot well mean that before asking anything we must know certainly that what we ask is according to his will. This would really preclude us, in ordinary circumstances, from asking anything, or at least from asking anything definite and precise. I say in ordinary circumstances. For we may be situated as Daniel was, when, upon an interpretation of Jeremiah's prophecy, he was infallibly led by inspiration to the conclusion that the period of the Babylonian captivity was expired, or expiring, and that Israel's restoration was certainly due. Without claiming, or having any right to claim, inspiration or infallibility, men have considered themselves entitled, on some extraordinary occasions, to ask certain things to be done by God in his providence, in the full assurance that they were according to his will. That there may be such instances of confidence in asking, upon a clear and certain conviction beforehand that what is asked is according to God's will,—confidence, not given by fresh inspiration, but reached by faith in exercise upon inspiration previously recorded,—may be admitted. But these exceptional cases can scarcely be held to meet the apostle's broad and general statement as to the efficacy of all believing prayer. Nor will it do to make this seeming qualification, "according to his will," a mere tag or appendix to all prayer and every prayer; as meaning simply that whatever we ask, we are to ask with this proviso, expressed or understood,

“if it be according to thy will.” No doubt, when we pray for anything which implies that God should order his providence one way rather than another,—thus and not otherwise;—and we can hardly pray for anything specific or definite which does not imply that;—we must, if we would not be guilty of presumption or impiety, virtually attach always the reservation which that formula implies. But this is so evidently indispensable, as a condition of all genuine and reverential prayer, that it could hardly be needful for John to state it. He must surely be pointing to some higher function of the prayer of faith.

“If we ask anything according to his will,”—may not this mean, “If we ask anything as we believe that he wills it?” We ask it as he wills it. In asking it, we put ourselves in the same position with him in willing it. He and we look at it from the same point of view. We who ask identify ourselves with him who wills. Whatever we ask, we ask as from within the circle of his will; we being one in our asking with him in his willing.

This may seem too high a position for us to occupy or aim at; too divine a stand-point; that we in asking, and God in willing, should be at one. And yet is it not the only fair, the only possible, alternative or antithesis to what is the only notion of prayer which the natural man can take in, the notion of bending God’s will to his? For that, unquestionably, is what, when he prays, the natural man desires.

The priests of Baal, when, in answer to Elijah’s

challenge, "they cried aloud and cut themselves after their manner," sought by their fierce and bloody importunity to bend the object of their mad worship to their purpose, and make him subservient to their pleasure. The sailors in the ship with Jonah, when they called every man upon his god, simply thought that they might be "heard for their much speaking." The instinct of physical pain in acute disease, or of natural affection in an anxious crisis, or of blank despair in sudden peril, may wring from unaccustomed lips a defiant or an abject appeal to the Ruler over all. It is an unknown God who is invoked, on the mere chance that he may be got to do their bidding. The heathen view of prayer, like the heathen view of sacrifice, proceeds upon that notion of subjecting God's determination to men's desire ; the prayer and the sacrifice being both alike intended to work upon the divine mind so as to change it into accordance with that of the worshipper. The idea is that God needs to be appeased, and that he may be persuaded ; that he needs to be appeased by sacrifice, so that wrath may give place to pity ; and that he may be persuaded by prayer to act otherwise than his inner nature might prompt, in compliance with solicitations, or in deference to pressure, from without.

But a right spiritual apprehension of God, as "having in himself eternal life," and "giving us that eternal life in his Son," places both sacrifice and prayer in an entirely different light. Eternal life must necessarily, in its nature as well as in its duration, be independent of time, and consequently also of time's changes and con-

tingencies, its influences and motives. As it is in God himself, it is self-moved, self-originated, self-inspired. He has within himself the grounds and reasons of all his proceedings. In so far as it is communicable to us through his Son and in his Son, it must possess substantially the same character of self containedness, if I may use such a term, or independence of things without. Only, in our case, this life of ours is "hid with Christ in God." It is his life in us.

How then does God himself—having life, this eternal life, in himself—stand related to prayer, or to sacrifice and prayer together? Both must be from within himself. They are alike and equally means of his own appointment or ordination. Sacrifice, the atoning sacrifice of his Son for us, is his own way of opening up communication between himself and us. Prayer, our prayer to him in his Son's name, is his own way of carrying on and carrying out the communication. He, having eternal life in himself, moved from within himself, gives to us this eternal life in his Son. And all the fruit or benefit of it he is pleased to give through prayer. For the eternal life which is now, in a sense, common to him and us, comes out in prayer. We meet in prayer, he and we together. And we meet, be it said with reverence, on the footing of our joint possession, in a measure, of the same eternal life ; life in ourselves ; he and we thus meet together.

Thus prayer, as it is here introduced, becomes a very solemn, because a very confidential, dealing with God. It is asking. But it is asking upon the ground of a very

close union and thorough identity between God and us, as regards the life to which the asking has respect, and of which it is the acting out. In plain terms, it is our asking as one in interest, in sympathy, in character, in end and aim—one, in short, in life or manner of living, with him whom we ask ; through his giving us eternal life ; that life being in his Son, and being indeed the very life itself of his Son.

This is not, however, to be regarded as of the essence of prayer, so that none may appeal to the throne of grace without it. God forbid that I should restrict the efficacy of prayer, however and whenever it is offered, out of a smitten conscience and broken heart. Not merely as a sinner out of Christ, but as a believer in Christ, I find my need, daily and hourly, of that liberty of access, as it were from without, to my God and Father, which I have in and with him who has taught me so to approach him.

But it is a somewhat different attitude that I am here called to assume ; different, and yet after all the same. I pray as having eternal life ; the very eternal life which God gives, and which is in his son Jesus Christ. What sort of prayer does that mean ? Are we not, in offering it, brought into the position of offering the prayer from the very same stand-point, if one may say so, on which God himself stands, when he answers the prayer ? We offer our prayer as “having eternal life ;”—God’s own eternal life, made over to us as ours in his Son. And that is the ground of the confidence which we have, “that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us.”

II. Hence we are to "know that we have eternal life" through our thus asking, in this confidence ; for "if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." We are to know our privilege in the using of it ; we are to know our position by taking advantage of it. We receive, in the Son, as the Father's gift, a new life. In its nature and manner of acting, it is analogous to the Father's own life, and indeed, in some sense, identical with it. The identity manifests itself in this confidence of prayer. In so far as my prayer is the working out of that identity, it must be confident, confiding, free, and bold. It must be real and actual conversation with God within his own holy place ; in his own inmost chamber ; upon the matter, whatever it is, that is the subject of my prayer. I get in now within the veil. I am a dweller in the secret place of the Most High. I am, as it were, behind the scenes of his great providential drama—his great economy of grace and judgment. I am with him ; one with him ; one with him in sympathy of mind and heart as to the eternal principles and laws upon which the whole plan of his moral administration proceeds. From that point of view I consider the question at issue ; the question to which my prayer relates ; and my prayer regarding it is framed accordingly. It is a setting forth of the matter, as, in all its aspects, it presents itself to me. It is a spreading of it out before God, as it appears to me ;—to me, however, as having God's gift to me of eternal life in his Son. For the case is now under my eye, not as it might pre-

sent itself to me, judging after the flesh, looking at things in the light of merely natural predilections and opinions ;—but as it presents itself to me, judging spiritually ; looking at things in the light of the eternal life which God gives me in his Son. Whatever I so ask must be according to his will ; and therefore I may have absolute confidence that I have it.

I may possibly see my way, upon this footing, to ask altogether unconditionally. I may so realise God's giving me eternal life in his Son,—and so clearly and unmistakeably and assuredly perceive how, in the view of that eternal life, the event at issue might best be ordered,—as to have the utmost boldness in preferring a specific request, absolutely and without qualification. Eminent saints of God have felt themselves entitled,—and have warrantably felt themselves entitled,—especially in critical emergencies, to be thus precise and peremptory ;—all the more if a brotherhood of them conferred and consulted together, under the guidance of God's word, as applied by the Spirit's help to his providence. All of them being led by the Spirit to the same conclusion, finding that the case presented itself to them all in the same aspect, and being of one mind as to what would best subserve the ends of the eternal life which they all have in common as God's gift in his Son ;—they may have considered themselves at liberty to condescend with great assurance upon the particular step which they would have God to take. And therefore they might unhesitatingly ask him to take it, and fearlessly reckon on his taking it. I suppose that this

is partly the Lord's meaning in that remarkable promise : —“ If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.”

Even in such a case, however, the prayer is not mere importunate solicitation, as from without; it partakes more of the nature of confidential conversation, within the circle of God's house and family. To adopt a homely phrase, it is as if, using the liberty of trusted children, we were telling our Father how the case under consideration strikes us; how it strikes us when we are looking at it—or trying to look at it—from his point of view; looking at it in the light of that “eternal life which he gives us in his Son.”

And what does it really matter, in such intercourse as this, on such a footing as this, with the only wise God, if we should ordinarily count it safer and more becoming to ask conditionally; under the reservation and with the qualification of deference and submission to his better judgment? Our asking anything thus conditionally, if only we ask in the spirit of the eternal life which we have in his Son, is very eminently “according to his will.” He cannot but approve of it. Nor does it in the least detract from our confidence in asking.

There is room indeed here for different degrees, not of our confidence in asking, but of the conditionality or unconditionality, if I may say so, with which we ask. Our confidence in asking is the same; the only difference is as to our making up our mind what to ask. As to that, we may well have some hesitation for the most

is to be our petition, and what our request? If we have respect simply to life temporal; if we take account merely of such considerations as this present earthly scene suggests; we cannot hesitate a moment. Looking at the case from a human stand-point, we need no time for deliberation. The instinct of natural affection will prompt,—and many reasons of Christian expediency will occur to enforce,—the loud wailing cry to the Lord to spare so precious and useful a life. But we feel that, as admitted to a participation with the Son in the eternal life of God, we have a higher standing and a weightier responsibility in this matter of prayer. We are lifted up to the very footstool on which the throne of the hearer of prayer itself rests; and from thence we look at the question, as he looks at it. Finding ourselves thus placed, our first impulse may be to shrink and hang back altogether. We refuse even to attempt to form a judgment, and to frame the judgment into a prayer, however guarded. But that is not his will; nor on second thoughts is it our wish. It is indeed a singularly high and holy position, in respect of insight and sympathy, that we are called to occupy in fellowship with God. But we are to occupy it boldly, and with all confidence. And now from that position we apply our mind, as it were, along with him, to the determination of what is best to be done; and we express our mind freely to him all along as we do so. We talk the whole affair over with him; conversing about it without reserve. We reason, we expostulate, we plead. We spread out before him all the views and considerations,

of whatever sort, that seem to us to have any bearing on the case; not excluding those suggested by warm natural affection and urgent earthly interests, but not limiting our regard to these. We say whatever occurs to us,—whatever it is in our heart to say.

What though in all this close and confidential dealing with God we should not be able to say positively what is best? Is it not a blessed intercourse notwithstanding? We may be reduced to utter straits: “Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say?” In our anguish of spirit, distracted between conflicting motives; altogether at a loss to decide what we would have God to do; driven out of reasoning and speech; we may be reduced to groaning and weeping; to “strong crying and tears.” What then? Is our confidence in prayer gone? Nay, it was when Jesus “in the days of his flesh made supplication with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death,” that he had the most complete assurance of his being “heard in that he feared.” And it is when “we know not what to pray for as we ought, that the Spirit, helping our infirmities, maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered.” Our unutterable groanings the blessed Spirit takes as his own, turning them into prayers; prayers very specially acceptable to the hearer of prayer. For “he who searcheth the heart knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit when he” thus “maketh intercession for the saints.” His doing so is “according to the will of God.”

Let us look then at the light which John’s teaching in these verses casts on the privilege and duty of prayer.

1. In the first place, let us consider what prayer is, as thus viewed, in all the fulness and variety of its confident assurance. It is not simply petitioning; it is not monotonous reiteration; the incessant sending up to heaven again and again of the same appeal;—the same demand for some specific deliverance, some precise and definite benefit, that may seem to us indispensable, that we feel as if we could not do without. It is a far more confidential dealing with God than that. It is our becoming “the men of his secret.” It is our getting into the inmost chamber of his house, and consulting with him there; seeking to know his mind; ready to make his mind ours. I say it is consulting with God. And the consultation may and must be full and free. It will embrace as its topics whatever can be of interest to him or to us; to him primarily, to us as under him. Hence, everywhere and always, and with reference to everything, we must be thus consulting with God; not only upon cases of difficulty or distress, but upon all sorts of cases; common cases, everyday cases; little cases, as well as cases of rare and grave emergency.

Prayer of this kind may be short, like the Lord’s strong cry of agony in the garden; it may be silent, like his groaning and weeping at Bethany. But it may be long, ever so long, without falling under the Lord’s censure of the long prayers of the Pharisees. In such prayer he himself often spent the whole long night. He was at home then and there with his Father; consulting with him about many things; about all things bearing on his Father’s glory and his own work; laying his own views

and feelings and wishes unreservedly before his Father ; and reverently learning his.

Brethren, pray thus without ceasing. "In everything, by such prayer and supplication, make your requests known to God." Carry everything ; literally everything ; everything that befalls you, or seems likely to befall you ; every choice you have to make ; whatever you have to say or do ; every care, every duty, every trial, every glad relief ; carry everything to God. Converse with God about it. Turn it over, as between God and you, in every possible way. Look at it from every possible point of view. Do not be in haste to make up your mind as to what is best ; as to what you should definitely ask. Rather prolong the blessed interview. The very suspending of your judgment, as the consultation goes on, may make the interview more blessed. And the issue will be the clear, calm "peace of God keeping your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ your Lord ;" "the single eye, making the whole body full of light."

2. Then, secondly, let us consider how close and intimate is the connection between life and prayer ; between God's giving us eternal life in his Son, and our asking thus confidently and confidentially. The two are really one ; the eternal life is realised and acted out in this asking. The life is prayer ; and prayer is the life. It is as partakers of the life which the Father has in himself, and which, by his gift, the Son also has in himself, that we ask and pray. The essential characteristic of that life is its self-containedness, if I may repeat the phrase ; its independence of things without ; its drawing from

within itself the motives of all its voluntary determinations. So the Father lives; not moved by impulses and influences of a temporal sort from without; but purposing and decreeing, willing and acting, always from himself and for himself. So the Son also lives, not as God merely, but as "the man Christ Jesus;" being, as to his manhood as well as his Godhead, in an intimate sense one with the Father; one in purpose and decree, in will and action; one in mind and heart. So also in a measure we, having the Son, live. Our real life is apart from the contingencies and accidents of time, being "hid with Christ in God." It is as so living, living that hidden life, that we ask and pray.

What harmony, what concord and agreement, what entire oneness, between God and us, does this imply! It is oneness of opinion, sentiment, feeling, desire; first, on the great fundamental question, What is life?—life worthy of the name,—life worth the living; and then, in subordination to that, upon every question which can touch that life. We form the same idea of life that God has, and that Christ has; the same idea of what it is worth while to live for. And it is under that idea, fixed and fastened deep in our inmost spirit, that we ask and pray. We settle in the Spirit with ourselves,—as well as with Christ and with God,—what is the only true, the only perfect, the only desirable life, for beings possessed of a divine faculty of intelligence, and destined to a divine immortality. Having that life, we commune with the living One, as our Father in Christ, upon all the great eternal aims and hopes which it contains, and

all the small temporal casualties by which, for a season, these aims and hopes may be environed and beset. Such communing about eternity, and about time as related to eternity, is prayer; the prayer which acts out "the eternal life which we have as God's gift in his Son."

3. In the third place, let us consider how very holy this life is, and how very holy therefore must be the prayer which acts it out. It is indeed our being "partakers of God's holiness." For such living fellowship and communion as is implied in the life and the prayer, sensitively shrinks from all unholy handling. Sense may not mar it; sin may not pollute it; the touch of earth's vanity or man's corruption breaks its sacred spell, and dissolves its peaceful charm. For the charm of this life of prayer is peace; the peace of God; the peace of conscious sympathy with the God of peace. But all earthliness, worldliness, and selfishness,—all diversity of judgment or feeling on any point between us and him whose eternal life we share,—in a word, all unholiness,—disturbs that peace. No unsanctified bosom can be its dwelling-place on earth, for its dwelling-place in heaven is the holy bosom of God. Therefore, "as he who hath called us is holy, let us also be holy."

4. For, in the fourth place, this faculty of praying as having eternal life, is itself to be sought by prayer. The life is God's gift in Christ, to be appropriated by faith; the Spirit shutting us up into Christ, and making us one with Christ. The prayer is in the Spirit and of the Spirit. It is the Spirit making intercession for us, with us, in us. It is the Spirit of his Son sent forth by

God into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. But the Spirit is given in answer to prayer. Therefore let us ask, seek, knock, that we may receive the Spirit; that he may dwell in us; that he may move us, as having eternal life in the Son, to pray, as the Son himself was wont to pray, in the Spirit. So moved, we may be praying confidently, as the Son prayed, in all sorts of ways; not only in prolonged midnight meditations, but in brief ejaculations as occasion calls; in hasty utterances; or when utterance fails, in sighs and tears and groans. For we have all boldness to be ever praying, after whatever sort of prayer may suit the times and seasons of our praying. Let us pray that we may receive the Spirit thus to embolden us always to pray;—to “ask according to his will,” even as the Spirit “maketh intercession for the saints, according to the will of God.”

XLII.

PRAYER FOR A BROTHER'S SIN, BUT NOT FOR A
SIN UNTO DEATH.

"If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death : I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin : and there is a sin [not] unto death."—
1 JOHN v. 16, 17.*

JOHN assumes that one chief use which you will be disposed to make of your right and power to pray will be to pray for others. He puts a case. You see your brother sinning. He is "your brother." This does not necessarily imply that he who sins is a true brother in the Lord. It has been already made manifest more than once in this epistle, that the relation of brotherhood, in the apostle's sense of the term, is of much wider reach and range. It arises not so much out of the character and standing of him whom you call your brother, as out of the nature of the affection with which you regard him. True, your brother, in the highest point of view, is he who, being really to God a son, is really to you on

* I incline to read this 17th verse without the negative in the last clause. The sense of the entire passage is not materially affected, whether we keep in or leave out the "not." But the authority of manuscripts is rather against it. And certainly the omission of it makes the meaning more plain and pointed. (See page 283.)

that account a brother. But whoever he may be whom you love with a brotherly love; with a love that treats him as a brother; not as a mere instrument to be used or companion to be enjoyed for a day, but as one having an immortal soul to be saved for eternity; every one so loved by you is your brother. When he sins, his sin vexes you as the sin of a brother. You cannot look on and see him sinning with indifference or amusement or contempt, as if he were a stranger, or a helot, or a dog. It is your brother whom you see sinning. And therefore you speak to him as to a brother about his sin; not harshly, with sharp reproach, or cutting sarcasm, or cold magisterial severity. With a brother's voice, coming out of the depths of a brother's bosom, you earnestly expostulate and affectionately plead with him. Alas! he turns to you a deaf ear, and you have no power to open it. But another ear is open to you, the ear of your Father in heaven; and he can open your brother's ear. To your Father in heaven you go. You deal with him about your sinning brother's case. You ask that life may be given to him; the "eternal life" which the sin he is committing justly forfeits. You grow importunate in asking; your importunity being in proportion to the truth and warmth of your brotherly love; you feel almost as if you could converse with God about nothing else. And you do converse with God about it,—oh, how pathetically! In all this you do well; using the liberty you have, as receiving "eternal life in his Son," to "ask anything, knowing that he hears you."

But is there no risk of excess or of error? May you

not be too onesided in looking at the case yourself, and in representing it to God? May you not be so concerned about the one terrible aspect of it,—its bearing on your brother's doom,—as to shut out the other aspect of it, which ought never to be lost sight of, its bearing on the Father's throne ;—on the holy and righteous sovereignty of his government and law? May not your sympathy with your sinning brother overbear somewhat your sympathy with him against whom he is sinning? May you not thus be led to overstep the limits of warrantable confidence,—so as to ask that life may be given to him, on any terms, at any cost, in any way, irrespectively altogether of what, in your calmer moments, you would yourself recognise as the paramount claims of the Most High? Thus your prayer for your sinning brother may slide insensibly into an apologetic pleading for indulgence to his sin. You may be tempted to represent as excusable what God regards as inexcusable ; and to feel as if, whatever your brother's criminality may be, there may still be favour shown to him notwithstanding. It is to guard you against such a frame of mind that the solemn warning is given : “ If a man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death : I do not say that he shall pray for it.”

I am persuaded that it is in the line of this train of thought that the solution of the difficult problem here suggested is to be sought. The whole analogy of the faith, as well as the bearing of the context, favours this

view. If I am right in this persuasion, some important consequences would seem to follow.

In the first place, there is no warrant in this text for the doctrine which Rome seeks to draw from it as to the distinction, in themselves,—in their own nature or in their accompanying aggravations,—between venial and mortal sins. Let the distinction be admitted as otherwise proved, it is nothing to the purpose here. A Romanist, in his anxious prayer for his sinning brother, may be tempted to put his sin into the wrong category, and to speak of it to God as venial, whereas it is really mortal. It is a temptation of the same sort that besets me; I admit it to be so. He, praying according to his creed which allows the distinction, is admonished, precisely as I who deny it am admonished. We are both warned against asking God to regard as venial what, in the view of his righteous judgment and holy supremacy, is and must be mortal. But this text itself does not decide between us. And if it appears from all the rest of Scripture that the Romanist's idea is not only unproved but disproved, the circumstance that this text might possibly be interpreted in consistency with his idea avails him nothing; since it turns out that it can be equally well, or even much better, interpreted in consistency with mine.

Secondly, there is no occasion to be solicitous in attempting to identify any particular sin, or any particular manner of sinning, as what is here said to be "unto death." The attempt, as all experience shows, is as vain as it is presumptuous. And yet, in spite of

all experience, the attempt is ever renewed. Morbid minds, or minds in a morbid state, become sensitive on the point ; but without warrant or reason. Even if there were "a sin unto death" that might be ascertainable in a man's own consciousness, the mention of it would not be to the purpose here, unless it were ascertainable also in the judgment of his neighbour or his brother. For the question is as to your praying for me. Even if I myself could know that I had sinned the sin unto death, how could you know that I had? However it might affect my praying for myself, how could it affect your praying for me? And as you have no right to judge me to that effect, so neither have I any right to judge myself. Let it be settled and fixed as a great truth, according to this and many other passages of Scripture, that there cannot be any such thing as my sinning a sin unto death, in such a sense as might warrant me, from my fear of my having committed it, to cease to pray for myself ;—far less warrant you, from an opinion on your part that I have committed it, to cease to pray for me.

For, thirdly, the real and only object of the apostle is to put in a caveat and lodge a protest against the intrusion into the sacred province of confidential prayer, especially when it is prayer for a sinning brother, of a tendency which is too natural and too apt to prevail, even in one having the eternal life which the Father gives in his Son ; the tendency, I mean, to subordinate the divine claims to considerations of human expediency or human pity. It is the same tendency which,

when the case is our own, is apt to bias and mislead us. Let us trace its working.

1. It is of course strongest in the unrenewed mind and unreconciled heart. While under their dominion, we cannot be expected to consult for God at all ; we consult only for ourselves. In forming a notion as to how God may, and as we think, ought to deal with us, we take little or no account of what may be due to him, to the honour of his holy name and the glorious majesty of his throne and law. We pay little or no regard to what the principles of his righteous moral administration and the interests of his loyal subjects may require. We think only of our own relief and safety ; our own convenience and accommodation. And hence we see no difficulty in our slight offences being overlooked and our infirmities indulged, upon our making certain formal submissions, and going through some routine of service. Thus we accept the serpent's lie : "Ye shall not surely die ;" no sin of ours being, in our view, if all extenuating circumstances are taken into account, "a sin unto death."

2. It should be otherwise with us now ; now that "having the Son we have life." We surely ought to be, as the Son is, on the Father's side ; one in interest and sympathy with him ; ready to give him the pre-eminence in all things, and to subordinate even what most pertains to our own welfare to the glorifying of his name and the doing of his will. We may be thankful that this does not entail on us the suffering and sacrifice which it entailed on him, when he, in the matter of the

cup given him to drink, submitted his own will to the Father's. Well may we be thankful that, through his taking our death as his and our having his life as ours, we may have the same mind that was in him, without its bringing such pain on us. Nay, for us, our putting God and his claims first, and putting ourselves and our concerns second, is in fact the secret of our safety and our rest.

All the more on that account is it reasonable to expect that in whatever we ask of God for ourselves, in our closest communing with him about our own affairs, whether temporal or spiritual, we should allow this principle to have full scope. But is it so? Alas! the old selfish spirit is ever apt to come back and come out again. It comes out, perhaps almost unconsciously, in our secret pleading that something in us or about us may be spared which God has doomed to destruction; be it some unmortified lust in the heart, or some doubtful practice of worldly conformity in the life. If indeed we are honestly communing with God about it,—placing his honour first and our case only second,—we can be at no loss what to ask. We can ask but one thing; the grace of instant decision to deal with what offends, as we know that God would have it dealt with. Are we asking that—asking it in faith—and acting accordingly? Or are we still irresolute, putting in a plea for some slight indulgence, some short delay; as if, after all, the evil were not so very serious, nor the danger of tolerating it for a little longer so very great? Brother, let me solemnly and affectionately warn you,—or rather, let the

beloved apostle warn you :—" All unrighteousness is sin : and there is a sin unto death."

3. In intercessory prayer, the tendency of which I speak operates powerfully and painfully. A rude and vulgar notion prevails amongst those who reject the gospel which we embrace, that we who embrace it, hugging ourselves in our own security, have a sort of pleasure in consigning all outside of our circle to inevitable and everlasting ruin. Alas ! they know not, either the weakness of our filial faith, or the strength, if not of our brotherly love, yet of our natural affection. The temptation is all the other way. It is all in the direction of our tampering and taking liberties with the sovereign authority and grace of God, in accommodation to the weakness, and even the wickedness, of men. We do not say, abstractly and absolutely, that there is not a sin unto death ; but we fondly hope that our brother's sin may not be held to be so. It is not hoping that he may repent of it. Such hope cannot well be too strong ; nor can our asking in terms of it be too confident. But here lies the danger. Our asking that he may repent of it, if his repenting of it is delayed, is apt,—oh, how apt !—apt in proportion as we love him, to slide unawares into our virtually asking that, though not repented of, it may be overlooked ; that at least it may not be reckoned to him as " a sin unto death."

It is often a very terrible test of our loyalty to God our Father, and our allegiance to his crown and his commandments, that is in such a case to be applied.

4. Take an extreme instance. One whom you loved

with truest brotherly love, with most intense longing to welcome him as a brother in Christ to your heart, has gone without affording you that joy ; he has died, giving no sign. He was lovely, amiable, pleasant. You and he were one in kin ; still more one in kind and in kindness. But he has passed away, continuing to the last in a course of life scarcely, if at all, reconcilable with even the profession of godliness. What is your temptation in such a case ? Ah, it is a very awful one ! It is to prefer his interest to the gospel of God and the law of God. It is to think that, culpable as he may have been, his culpability may not have proved fatal. It is to cherish the fond imagination that, in spite of the law which he has broken and the gospel which he has rejected, he may still, on the ground of qualities which won your admiration, or sufferings which moved your compassion, find some measure of mercy in the end.

It is very tender ground on which I tread ; I know it ; experimentally I know it. Far, very far, be it from me, to insist on your judging a departed brother, however he may have sinned, and continued in his sin to the last. He is in the hands of God. Leave him there without questioning. Think of the old rhyming adage—

“ Between the stirrup and the ground,
Mercy I sought, mercy I found.”

Think too of the more authentic instance of the thief on the cross ; by all means think of that, and take what comfort you can from that. But beware ! Sorely,—oh, how sorely !—are you tempted first to wish that there were some room for such as he was,—even continuing

still the same,—within the holy city of the most high God ; and then to hope that there may be. It is, I repeat, a very sore temptation. Many a brokenhearted mourner in Zion has felt it ; you and I have felt it ; and we have felt that, under the influence of it, we have been beginning to underrate the need of regeneration, and conversion, and a living faith, and a holy walk ; to dream of men who gave no evidence here of anything like such grace, being possibly safe without it hereafter. And what next? We become insensibly more tolerant than we were of sin in ourselves ; less alive to the necessity of immediate repentance and faith ; more inclined to temporise and compromise ; to look at things not from God's point of view but from our own ; as if he had not “given to us his own eternal life in his Son.”

Let us see to it above all things,—though it may cost us often many a struggle and many a tear,—that we do not suffer our firm faith in God, and our loving loyalty to him, to fall a sacrifice to the fond relentings of our own weak hearts. Whatever may be its bearing on the fate of any brother, let us, for God's sake and our own, for God's honour and our own salvation, accept it as a great and solemn fact, that “all unrighteousness is sin, and that there is a sin unto death.”

5. You do not pray for the dead ; you do not think it lawful. It is in the indulgence of a trembling hope concerning them that the temptation of which I speak besets you. But the same temptation besets you also when you pray for the living. It is the temptation to wish that, in its application to the sin which you see

your brother sinning, God's holy law were not so very uncompromising, nor his righteous judgment so very unrelenting, as they are declared to be. No doubt you ask that your brother may receive grace to repent of his sin. But what if he should not? You have a sort of reserved notion that, even in that case and upon that supposition, there may be some chance of safety for him. That is the temptation. And it is often a most severe and stern trial of your faith to resist it; to ask life for your sinning brother; but to ask it evermore under the deep conviction that "all unrighteousness is sin, and that there is a sin unto death."

Let us see, once for all, what the apostle's solemn statement really implies.

In the first place, let it be very specially noted that this is the one only limitation which John puts upon the liberty of intercessory prayer. And let us mark well where the limitation applies. It does not really touch our privilege of asking life for our brother, in the true and full sense of life;—the eternal life which God gives, and which is in his Son. We may not ask for him this life, if we ask it for him as sinning, and contemplated by us as possibly sinning unto death. And for the best of all reasons we may not thus ask; for it is asking what, even with God, is an impossibility. But, short of that impossibility, there is no restriction laid on our asking; we may ask life for him, to the utmost of our heart's desire. We may use the utmost freedom in asking life for him, provided only we do not ask it for him as sinning, and continuing to sin, unto death. Be his sin ever so

heinous, let it be the sin of a whole long lifetime of ungodliness, we may ask life for him, in the line of his repenting and believing the gospel, provided only, I repeat, that we do not ask it as if life could be given him in any other way.

I know that a question may be raised even here, as to the extent to which we may absolutely and unconditionally ask for our sinning brother faith and repentance, and having asked, may positively know that "we have the petition that we have desired of God." I know that there are difficulties in the direction now indicated. They are difficulties connected with that decree of election which alone secures the salvation of any sinner ;—but they are difficulties which we may conceive of as possibly hindering the salvation of some sinner for whom we pray. They are difficulties, however, which do not touch such intercessory prayer more than they touch any other sort of prayer ;—and indeed all prayer, generally and universally. The decree of election can no more hinder my praying confidently for my sinning brother, than it can hinder my praying confidently for my sinning self. In either case, it is one of "the secret things belonging to the Lord our God," not one of "the revealed things belonging to us and to our children." At all events, this text has nothing to do with that. It imposes no restriction on our prayer arising out of God's eternal purpose. The only restriction which it does impose is one rendered necessary by our own infirmity, and the temptation to which it exposes us. We are not to ask, what we are tempted to ask, that our brother, continuing in

sin, may yet be saved ; that while still sinning unto death, he may nevertheless somehow live. But under that reservation, reasonable surely, and necessary, we have all liberty, so far as this text is concerned ;—and it is the only text in all the Bible that can by any possibility be supposed to fetter or abridge our liberty ;—we have all liberty, I say, to ask life for our brother. It is a wide charter, altogether broad and free.

But, secondly, there is an obvious practical application suggested by the reservation. If we ask life for our brother, knowing that he cannot have it while sinning unto death ; or, in other words, that he cannot have it otherwise than in the way of believing and repenting ; our prayer for him, if sincere, must imply our personal dealing with him with a view to his believing and repenting. If what we asked for him were simply life,—life in any sense and on any terms,—we might let him alone. Having asked, we might think that we could do nothing more to help in bringing about the desired result. But it is not so ; it is far otherwise. We may take part along with him whom we ask, the hearer of prayer, in what we ask him to do ; we must take part along with him, if our asking is real and earnest. To ask God to give life to our sinning brother while we ourselves “suffer sin upon him”—not warning him even with tears ;—sin, the very sin that is hurrying him on to death ;—what mockery !—how insulting to our God, and oh, how cruel to our poor brother himself !

Finally, in the third place, let our conviction be clear, strong, and deep, that “all unrighteousness is sin, and

that there is a sin unto death." Let us see that there is no faltering, no hesitancy as to that great fact or truth. Upon both the parts of this solemn declaration let our faith be firm, and let our trumpet give no uncertain sound. It is at this point that a stand is to be resolutely made against all antinomian license in religion ; for it is at this point that the enemy has always pressed the church most hardly, and alas ! the church has too often shown herself weak. The knowing ones who corrupted the gospel in John's own day undermined the citadel at this very point. They held and taught that unrighteousness, unholiness, uncleanness—which would be sin in any one else—might be no sin in the spiritual man. It could only defile the body. And what of that, the body being perishable ? It could not touch the essence of the living and immortal soul. Sin therefore, even when persevered in to the end, might yet be not unto death. John does not reason with these wicked men ; it is not a case for reasoning. He meets their vile, foul, base imagination with the stern assertion of law and appeal to conscience : " All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin unto death."

Ever and anon, from age to age, the same abominable devil's creed has troubled and polluted the church of God. Nay, even when the church is undisturbed by it, still, ever and anon, it troubles and pollutes the child of God, in some one or other of its insidious temptations.

For alas ! alas ! it is but too congenial to the sloth and selfishness and sensuality that still prevail too much within him. Ah me ! how apt am I to cherish the secret,

half-unconscious notion, that this or that infirmity besetting me, or besetting my much-loved brother,—infirmity which, if I saw it attaching to any one else, I would not scruple for a moment to denounce as sin,—may somehow in my case, or in my brother's, be more mildly characterised and more gently dealt with! How apt am I to hope that this or that little secret sin which I feel cleaving still to me, or see cleaving still to my brother, may after all, and in the long run, not prove fatal! Ah, if there be but the faintest taint of this damnable heresy lurking in your inner man, how can you be prosecuting, with anything like earnestness, the work of your own personal sanctification, or seeking, with anything like faithfulness, the sanctification of your brother;—asking God to give you life, or to give him life? Be very sure that if you would be safe yourself, and if you would save him, you need to shun, as you would a pestilential blast, or the very breath of hell, whatever tends, however remotely, to confound the everlasting distinctions of right and wrong, or shake the foundations of truth and virtue which are the very pillars of the universe and of the throne of God. It is a “word which doth eat as a canker.” Beware, and again I say beware, of scepticism on the great eternal principles of moral duty—of the moral law. “Be not deceived; God is not mocked.” “The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” “All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin unto death.”

XLIII.

THE BELIEVER AS BORN OF GOD KEEPING HIM-
SELF SO AS NOT TO SIN.

“All unrighteousness is sin : and there is a sin [not] unto death. We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not ; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.”—1 JOHN v. 17, 18.

THE last clause of the seventeenth verse may best be read without the negative. There is, I believe, preponderating manuscript authority for so reading it. And, as regards internal evidence, it seems easier to explain,—and this is a good criterion,—how, if not originally in the text, it might creep in, than how, if originally in the text, it could fall out. The insertion of it by copyists, perhaps first as a conjectural marginal reading, can easily be explained by their supposing it necessary to harmonise the statement in the seventeenth verse with that in the verse before, so as to bring in again the idea of the lawfulness of praying for life for them that sin not unto death. This seventeenth verse, however, rather points the thought, not backwards to the sixteenth, but onwards and forwards to the eighteenth. Do not imagine that in praying for a sinning brother, you may overlook the possibility of his sin being unto death. Do not pray for him as if you thought that in accommodation to his case

God's law might be relaxed, and he, though sinning so as to deserve to die, and continuing so to sin, might yet not surely die. Beware of that ; for your own sake, as well as for his sake ; for your own sake, even more than for his sake. For you are in danger of being led to tolerate in yourselves what you are inclined to palliate in a brother. You secretly hope that there may be impunity for him, even though he is continuing in sin. Is there no risk of your being tempted to cherish a similar hope for yourselves ; and so to forget the great truth that "all unrighteousness is sin : and there is a sin unto death ?"

But you may be saying within yourselves, "Who-soever is born of God doth not commit sin ; for his seed remaineth in him : and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (iii. 9). You, therefore, as born of God, may hold yourselves safe in extenuating sin in a brother, and deprecating on his behalf its terrible doom. Still beware ! It is true that, as it has been explained, whosoever is born of God does not and cannot sin. "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not." Yes, we know that. But we know also that his not sinning, however it may be connected with his being born of God, and secured by God's seed, the seed of the divine nature and eternal life, remaining in him,—is not so connected with that fact, or so secured by it, as to preclude the necessity of care and watchfulness. He has "to keep himself ;" and that too in the presence of a formidable enemy. "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not." But why not ? Because "he that

is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not."

He "keepeth himself." The phrase might suggest two ideas : that of keeping, as if restraint were needed ; or that of keeping, as if care and culture were intended. This last is probably to be regarded as the right sense, not however by any means to the exclusion of the other. He has to guard himself against the touch of "that wicked one" from without ; and he has carefully to watch and foster the growth of the divine seed within. His thus keeping himself is the effect of his being born of God ; and it is the cause, or means, of his not sinning. Not otherwise than in the way of his keeping himself, can one born of God be safe from sinning. In an important and practical point of view, he must be his own keeper. And his keeping himself will be earnest, sedulous, anxious, in proportion to the sense he has of the value of what is to be kept, on the one hand, and of its liability to sustain damage, or be lost, on the other.

I. What is to be kept, O child of God ? Yourself ! Not yourself as you are by nature, but yourself as born of God. Consider, first, what is implied in that solemn thought.

Even as regards the life that now is, you have to keep yourself. Self-preservation is both your right and your duty ; your right, which you are to vindicate though your doing so may involve an assailant's death ; your duty, which, whatever you may think about your own worth or value, you are not at liberty to renounce

or to neglect. You are not entitled to throw yourself away ; you are bound to keep yourself. And that, not only in the sense of your not literally committing suicide ; for you may abstain from suicide and yet be virtually a self-destroyer. You are bound to keep yourself as one,—whatever you are, and wherever you are,—that is too costly to be cast away, being still, as you are, within the reach of divine grace and eternal life. You have no more right, in any circumstances, or in any mood or frame of mind, to give yourself up to despair, than you have to give yourself up to death.

But it is as a child of God that you are here said to keep yourself. Consider, I say again, what that means.

Try for a moment to separate in imagination yourself as the keeper, from yourself as what is to be kept. Look upon yourself objectively ; as if you were looking at another person. Or, to make this easier, look first at another person, as if he were yourself. Suppose yourself your brother's keeper ; keeping him as if he were yourself. And, to make the analogy a fair one, suppose yourself to be, under God, his only keeper. And suppose also that you are his keeper in the sense of having most intimate access to his inner man, as well as entire control over his outward actions.

Well, you keep him ; you, as born of God, keep him, as born of God ;—would that we were all thus keeping one another ! But what sort of keeping will it be ? That will depend on the vividness of the apprehension which you have of your own sonship, and of his ; of your being born of God, and his being born of God. He

whom you have to keep is no ordinary piece of goods. He may have been once vile ; a condemned criminal ; and as such, unclean. But "what God has cleansed you cannot call common or unclean." He is very precious now, and very pure. He has the seed of God abiding in him ; the germ and principle of an absolutely sinless character and life. It is in that view, and upon that supposition, that you have to "keep" him. Your whole treatment of him must be accommodated to that fact. Need I bid you ask yourself what your treatment of him would, or at any rate should be, if you had to keep him as thus "born of God?"

Now if your keeping yourself is to be at all such as you feel that your keeping of your brother ought to be in the case supposed, it must proceed upon as clear and explicit a recognition of your own standing as, in that case, there would be of his. If you are really to keep yourself, you must distinctly understand, and strongly realise, what it is about you that is to be kept ; what is the character in which, and what the standard by which, and what the end for which, you are to keep yourself.

For instance, I may feel that I have to keep myself as a good worldly man, or a good moral man, or a good man of business, or a good man of society, or a good neighbour and friend ; a good husband, father, brother, son. I can only keep myself, in any of these characters, by first making it thoroughly, inwardly, intensely, my own, and then thoroughly acting it out. It will not do to assume it, or to imagine it ; neither will it do to admit it in any doubtful or hesitating way. If I am to keep

myself, I must know and apprehend myself actually to be what I mean, by keeping myself, to continue to be.

In keeping myself as born of God, this personal and realising faith is especially needful. The secret of my not keeping myself, with enough of watchfulness and prayer, is too often to be found in the want of it. I keep myself, perhaps, with tolerably decent consistency, as a professing member of the church ; I keep myself as an upright, charitable, and correctly religious man. But do I take home to myself the obligation of keeping myself as more than that ? Do I adequately apprehend the fact that I am more than that ; that I am really and truly "born of God ?" Do I sufficiently apprehend what that means ? Nothing else will ensure my "keeping myself."

I do not speak now of assurance, in a doctrinal point of view. No question is raised here as to a believing man being assured, for his own comfort, of his present standing and of his final salvation. The whole strain of John's teaching is practical. Whether or not he that is born of God is to sit down and conclude reflexly that he is born of God, is not said. It is not even said that he is to raise the question. All that is said is, that he is to treat himself ; he is to keep himself ; as born of God. He is so to use and deal with himself, as he would use and deal with what is born of God. It is not to any reflex or subjective exercise of faith, ascertaining itself simply for its own confirmation and confidence, that he is called, but to the direct, objective acting out of his faith. And that is all in the line of his practically keeping himself, as he feels that what is born of God ought to be and must be kept.

What sort of keeping of oneself should grow out of such a vivid and realising sense as this implies of what being born of God means, it is not necessary to describe minutely or at large. The working out of the problem may well be left to our own consciences and hearts. The main thing is to secure here, as everywhere, singleness of eye. Only let us settle it decidedly, firmly, unequivocally, as the deep conviction of our souls, that it is as "born of God" that we are to "keep ourselves."

Ah! if we did so, would there be so much careless living among us; so much unsteadfast walking; so much indifference to the way in which our customary manner of spending our time and occupying our thoughts tells on our spiritual state? Would there not be more of earnest prayer, of secret fellowship with God, of diligent study of his word, of anxious watchfulness; more of an eager pressing on to higher attainments in divine insight and sympathy, in holiness and love?

For to keep ourselves as born of God, is to aim at exhausting experimentally all that the privilege involves. It is to keep ourselves, as sons and heirs, in the full enjoyment of our Father's love, and in the full view of the many mansions of our Father's house.

II. This keeping of ourselves, as born of God, will be felt to be the more necessary, when we consider, secondly, how liable that which is to be kept is to suffer damage and be lost. If we are born of God, and if it is in that character that we are to keep ourselves,—let us remember how apt that character is to be marred and injured by the outer world with which we are ever

coming in contact ; how apt it is to lose its marked distinctiveness and fresh life in our own souls.

As born of God, we have to "keep ourselves unspotted from the world ;" we have to keep ourselves also unspotted from the evil that is in us, as "born in iniquity and conceived in sin." In both views, what is above all things needed is to cherish a deep, abiding, personal, practical persuasion that "all unrighteousness is sin, and that there is a sin unto death."

The risk of relaxed diligence in "keeping ourselves as born of God" lies mainly in our ceasing, more or less consciously, to regard sin as exceeding sinful, and the doom of sin is inevitably certain. Hence, in order to our keeping ourselves, it is of the utmost consequence, first of all, that we truly and fully apprehend that we are to keep ourselves as being born of God. And it is of equal consequence, secondly, that we truly and fully apprehend the absolute incompatibility of our sinning with our being born of God. Sin from without and from within is ever besetting us. And the temptation is very strong to begin to think that, in some form or degree, it may not be altogether damaging to our spiritual life, as born of God, or altogether fatal to our heavenly prospects, as having eternal life. The instant such a thought finds harbour in our bosom, all our faithfulness in keeping ourselves is gone. "Whosoever is born of God keepeth himself,"—only when he realises his own sacredness as "born of God ;" and when moreover he realises ;—and that too with special reference, not merely to the world with which he is ever in contact, but also

to himself and his own tendencies and liabilities ;—the solemn truth that “all unrighteousness is sin, and that there is a sin unto death.”

There is no room for any question being raised here as to the certainty of his final salvation, or the security for his preservation in grace to the end. That is not the point. Be it that God keeps him, and will keep him, infallibly safe ;—God does so, and can do so, only through his keeping himself. And his keeping himself implies a constant sense of his liability, after all, so far as he is himself concerned, to be lost. So Paul kept himself :—“I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection : lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away.” So will every one that is born of God keep himself ; remembering the exhortations, “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall ;” “Thou standest by faith ; be not highminded, but fear.”

And this fear,—not slavish fear of an angry God, but filial fear of a loving Father,—the fear of filial love,—will grow, and will become more and more “fear and trembling.” It will do so in proportion as I apprehend, with growing vividness, on the one hand, all the holy blessedness that there is in being born of God, and on the other hand, all that there is in sin ; in any sin ; in every sin ; of deep and deadly malignity, making it the very bane of that blessedness. Thus, with increasing sensitiveness, will I be keeping myself “as born of God, and not sinning.” Thus will I be “working out my own salvation with fear and trembling, because it is

God which worketh in me both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

I do not now enter on the consideration of the promise annexed to this self-keeping: "The wicked one toucheth him not." I prefer to take that promise in connection with what follows. I content myself with one observation on its connection with what precedes.

"The wicked one" seeks to touch you; to touch you at the tenderest and most sensitive point, where alone lies your security against sinning; your being "born of God." For it is only as born of God that you sin not. It is in your filial standing thoroughly realised, and in your filial spirit thoroughly cherished and exercised, that the secret of your not sinning lies. The wicked one knows that right well; he quite understands it. Full well he knows and understands that if he can get you, be it only for a brief hour or moment, to step off from the platform of your sonship;—or if he can insinuate into your breast at any time a single unchildlike thought of God;—he has you at his mercy. And you sin. You listen to his whispered suggestion that this or that commandment of God is grievous. You suffer his wily insinuation,—“Yea, hath God said that ye shall not?”—to poison your ear, to poison your soul. You let in the spirit of bondage again. The light and liberty of your loving cry, “Abba, Father,” are gone. Shorn of your strength, you repine, you murmur, you sin.

Ah, friends! “keep yourselves.” And see to it that you keep yourselves as “born of God.” Keep your-

selves in your conscious sonship, and in the spirit of it. Then "the wicked one toucheth you not." Be very sure that it is sonship believingly apprehended and realised,—it is the spirit of sonship faithfully cherished and exercised,—that is your only real shield and defence against the touch of the wicked one. For his touch,—his stinging touch,—is the suggestion of the poor servile thought that God's commandments are grievous. The filial, loving confidence of one keeping himself as a child of God instinctively and indignantly casts away the insinuation. The wicked one therefore cannot touch one living as a son of God. He could not touch, terribly as he tried to touch, the Son of God while he lived on earth ; for never did he live otherwise than as the Son of God. He cannot touch any one to whom God gives "the Spirit of his Son, crying, Abba, Father." For no one can be, at any moment, crying, in the Spirit, Abba, Father, and at the same moment counting any of God's commandments grievous. Therefore, when "he that is begotten of God" keepeth himself as so begotten, "the wicked one toucheth him not."

XLIV.

OUR BEING OF GOD.—THE WORLD LYING IN THE
WICKED ONE.

“And that [the] wicked one toucheth him not. We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness” [the wicked one].—1 JOHN v. 18, 19.

INSTEAD of “wickedness,” in the nineteenth verse, we may rather read “the wicked one.” There is now a general agreement among critics and interpreters to that effect. There is no good reason for any change in this verse from the rendering in the verse before. There it must unavoidably be personal, “the wicked one toucheth him not.” It is quite unnecessary and unwarrantable to make it impersonal and abstract here, “the whole world lieth in wickedness.” It is the same expression and should be translated in the same way, “the whole world lieth in the wicked one.” For the change mars the sense, and destroys the obvious contrast that there is between the child of God, whom that wicked one does not touch, and the world which, so far from being safe from his touch, lies wholly in him.

We know this last fact, as knowing ourselves to be of God ; and it is our thus knowing it that mainly contributes to our security.

For that is the precise point and purpose of the

statement, "the whole world lieth in the wicked one." It is a statement introduced for a purely practical end ; an end or purpose personal to us, as begotten of God, and, in that character, "keeping ourselves." It has no reference to any other persons besides ourselves ; it is strictly applicable, and meant to be applied, to ourselves alone. There is no contrast intended between us and the rest of mankind. There is no emphasis in the "we,"—"we are of God,"—as in contradistinction to those of our fellow-men who may be classed as "the world." In fact the "we" is not in the original at all. It is supplied, and of course necessarily supplied, in our translation. But its not being expressed in the original is plain proof, as all scholars know, that it is not intended to be emphatic, or to suggest any contrast between us and any other body of men. We have nothing here to do with any but ourselves ; the text is written solely for our learning, for our warning. It bids us remember that we, being of God, are not of that world which lies wholly in the wicked one. It bids us do so, in order that, being begotten of God, we may so "keep ourselves," as being begotten of God, that the "wicked one shall not touch us."

Thus the world is here to be viewed rather as a system than as a society ; with reference not so much to the question who constitute the world, as to the question what the world is ; what is its character and constitution ; what are its arrangements ; its habits of thought, feeling, and action ; its pursuits, occupations, and pleasures.

One common feature is brought out, helping us to identify and characterise it. The whole of it "lieth in the wicked one."

It is a strong expression; going beyond any of John's previous intimations on this subject. He makes early mention of "the wicked one" (ii. 13, 14). Believers are represented as, in the strength of their mature and vigorous spiritual youth, overcoming, or having overcome, "the wicked one." Thereafter, when "the wicked one" comes up again (iii. 12), he is plainly identified with the devil (iii. 8-10), in respect of his murderous hatred of God and of whatever is born of God; he kills or seeks to kill whatever and whoever is of God. Next, he appears as that "spirit of antichrist" which is in the world, as "the spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh" (iv. 3). Here it is said, not that he is in the world, but that the world lies in him. It lies, and lies wholly, in him. He has got the world into his arms; the whole world.

I. "The world lieth in the wicked one." The figure may suggest several different ideas. A stranded vessel lying imbedded in the sand; a lost sheep lying engulfed in the treacherous swamp; a sow contented to lie wallowing in the mire; a Samson lying bewitched in Delilah's lap;—these are the images called forth; and they are all but too appropriate.

Considered in its origin, this "lying of the world in the wicked one" may be taken in a very literal and personal sense.

The fall is a fall out of the arms of God into the

embrace of the wicked one. He is ready to receive the fallen; and, in a measure, to break their fall. He has a bed of his own prepared on which the fallen may lie in him. It is shrewdly and plausibly framed. It is like himself. It is the embodiment of his mind and spirit; the acting out of his very self. It is a couch composed of the very materials he had before woven into the subtle cord of that temptation which drew the unfallen out of God's hold into his. The same elements of unbelief which he turned to such cunning account in his work of seduction, he employs with equal skill in getting the seduced to lie, and to lie quiet, in him. For the most part, he finds this an easy task. The world listens willingly to its seducer, now become its comforter and guide; and frames its creed and constitution according to his teaching and under his inspiration. He is its doctor of divinity. Its faith, worship, discipline, and government are dictated by him. So "the world lies in him;" dependent on him and his theology for such assumed license and imaginary peace as it affects to use and to enjoy.

For the essence of worldliness is at bottom the feeling that "God's commandments are grievous;" that his service is hard, and himself austere; but yet that somehow his indulgence may be largely reckoned upon in the end. It is as "lying in the wicked one," that the world so conceives of God, and acts upon that conception of him. It is as "lying in the wicked one," that it peevishly asks, "Who is the Almighty that we should serve him, and what profit shall we have if we bow

down unto him?"—while at the same time it confidently presumes, "The Lord seeth not, the Lord regardeth not."

II. "The whole world thus lieth in the wicked one;" he has it all in his embrace. There is nothing in or about the world that is not thus lying in the wicked one; so lying in the wicked one as to be infected with the contagion of his hard thoughts of God, and his affected bravery in defying God's righteous judgment.

Take the world at its very best; all its grossness put away; no vile lust or passion polluting it; much pure virtue adorning it; many pious sentiments coming forth from it, not altogether insincerely. What trace is there here of the wicked one's poisonous touch? What necessity for your being warned to be on your guard against it or him?

Nay, but look deeper into the heart of what is so seeming fair. Do you not see,—do you not instinctively feel,—that there is throughout its sphere of influence a sad want of that entire surrender of self to God, that unreserved owning of his sovereignty,—the sovereignty of his throne, his law, his grace,—that full, loyal, loving trust, which alone can baffle Satan's wiles? Instead of that, is there not a hidden fear of coming to too close quarters and too confidential dealings with God; a disposition to stand aloof and make terms of compromise; a willingness to be persuaded that some questionable things may be tolerated and some slight liberties allowed? Is not all this what "lying in the wicked one" may best explain?

We are not safe unless we realise it as a fact that

"the whole world lieth in the wicked one;" all of it; the best of it as well as the worst of it. Only thus can we "so keep ourselves that the wicked one shall not touch us." It is a sad fact, but we must realise it. And in the firm and full realisation of it, we must "keep ourselves."

For it is not with a view to our condemning or judging the world, but only in order to our "keeping ourselves," that we are to have this fact always before our eyes; it is in order to our so "keeping ourselves that the wicked one shall not touch us." For it is through "the world which is lying in him" that he seeks to "touch us." We are coming constantly into contact with the world; we cannot help it; and yet we are to keep ourselves "unspotted from the world." How better may we hope, through grace, to do so, than by "knowing," in the sense of always and everywhere acting upon the knowledge, that "we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the wicked one?"

Let us recognise our own standing in God, and the world's lying in the wicked one. We are of God, born of God; his sons in his Son Jesus Christ. That is our character and position. It is in that character, and with reference to that position, that we are to "keep ourselves." Let us be ever mindful of our high and holy calling. And that we may be ever mindful of it, let us be ever sensitively alive to the risk of the wicked one's contamination. True, "the wicked one toucheth us not." But "the whole world lieth in him." And the world touches us, for we are in the world.

Ah! does not our danger spring from our practically forgetting that the world in which we are "lieth wholly in the wicked one?" Have not we found it so? We begin to think, or to live as if we thought, that after all the world does not lie absolutely and altogether in the wicked one; that it is not so thoroughly evil as that would imply. We find, or fancy that we find, some of it at least, such as we would not choose to characterise so offensively. The world may be mostly, or for the most part, lying in the wicked one. But surely some exception may be made in favour of this or that about it that looks so harmless and so good.

O child of God, beware. "The wicked one" is "touching you very closely," through "the world that lieth in him," when he gets you thus to plead. The Spirit teaches you a safer and better lesson when he moves you to say: "We know that we are of God, and the whole world"—all of it—"lieth in the wicked one."

This teaching of John, concerning the world as lying in the wicked one, is in striking accordance with that of Paul in two remarkable passages of his Epistle to the Ephesians (ii. 1, vi. 12). One would almost think indeed that John had Paul's teaching in his view. At all events, it may be interesting and useful to notice the parallelism and harmony between the two apostles.

I. Consider the first of the two passages (Ephes. ii. 1): "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince

of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." Writing to the Ephesians as now believers, Paul reminds them of their former walk. It was "according to the course of this world." But "the world, the whole world, lieth in the wicked one." Therefore, walking according to the course of this world, they walked according to the wicked one in whom the world lies. How the world lies in him, so that walking according to the world's course is really walking according to him, is explained in two ways.

1. He is "the prince of the power of the air." He rules, as a powerful prince, the world's atmosphere; its moral and spiritual atmosphere; impregnating it with his own venom; the poisonous vapour of his own dark and godless hell. The air which the world breathes is under his control;—he is the prince of the power of it; its powerful prince. It is, as it were, compounded, concocted and manufactured by him. Very wisely does he use his power; very cunningly does he compose the air which he would have his subjects and victims to breathe. He mingles in it many good ingredients. For the worst of men he does so; and indeed he must do so, if he is to make it palatable and seductive even to them. For the lowest company, he must needs prepare an atmosphere with something good in it; good fellowship at the least, and a large measure of good humour and good feeling. Then, as he rises to higher circles, how does he contrive, in the exercise of his princely power, to make the air that is to intoxicate his votaries,—or lull them to unsuspecting sleep,—all redolent, as it might seem, of good;

good sense, good taste, good temper; good breeding and behaviour; good habits and good-heartedness! Many noisome vapours also that might offend he carefully excludes; so that the inhaling organ perceives nothing but what is pure and simple in what it imbibes and absorbs. But it is the wicked one's air or atmosphere after all; he is the prince of the power of it. He contrives to have it all pervaded with the latent influence of his own ungodliness; his godless spirit is in it all through. The whole world is lying in that subtle atmosphere of his; the air of which he is the powerful prince.

Have you not felt something of what it is to breathe the air of which the wicked one is thus the powerful prince—to breathe it at the time almost unconsciously, and afterwards to find the fruit of your having breathed it all but inexplicable? You come home from a business engagement, or a party of pleasure. You feel an unwonted indisposition to serious thought; you are less inclined than usual to prayer and meditation; anxious calculations or frivolous fancies, and vain if not vicious imaginations, intrude into the sanctuary of your inner worship; you are not so much at home as you were before, in your closet-fellowship with your Father in heaven. You are at a loss to account for this. You have not been anywhere, or done anything, in known or conscious opposition to his will. But you have been living in an unwholesome atmosphere. You have been in scenes or societies; all decent and proper no doubt; but yet imbued with as thorough a spirit of indifference or alienation as the wicked one would care to inspire.

You have forgotten that "the whole world lieth in the wicked one" as "the prince of the power of its air."

2. Nor is this all. He is "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." He is not content with exercising his power in concocting and compounding the world's atmosphere; he is busily moving to and fro, and up and down, in the ranks of those who breathe it. He prepares for them the air he would like them to inhale, making it as soothing and seductive as he can. And then, while they are inhaling it, he deals with them personally; going in and out among them; whispering his suggestions; speaking low into their ears; insinuating into their hearts such thoughts of God, and of his service, and of his gospel, as fit into the pervading godless spirit of the region into which he has got them to venture. In this view, he very specially works among them as "the children of disobedience." He takes advantage of every rising feeling of distrust and disaffection; he watches for the first beginnings of discontent. Wherever there is any disposition to count any of God's appointments or commandments grievous, he is at hand; to fan the flame; to irritate the sore; to widen the breach between the loving Father and his undutiful child, beginning to question and rebel.

So the whole world doubly, or in a double sense, lies in the wicked one; inasmuch as he is the prince of the power of its air on the one hand, and inasmuch as, on the other hand, he is ever working in it among the children of disobedience. And in both views, it concerns you deeply, as "knowing yourselves to be of God,"

and called to keep yourselves accordingly, to know that "the whole world lieth in the wicked one." Know this, that you may beware of its seductive atmosphere, of which he is the powerful prince. Know it, that you may beware of the first rising in you of that insubordinate and impatient spirit of which he avails himself so skilfully in his "working among the children of disobedience." If you would keep yourselves, as being of God, so that in respect of your being begotten of God the wicked one may not touch you, you must be ever alive to this double risk; the risk of your forgetting how thoroughly he controls the world's atmosphere; and the risk also of your forgetting how busily and persuasively he works among the children of disobedience in it.

Keep yourselves, in both views, unspotted from the world. Keep yourselves, as born of God, in the atmosphere into which your new birth introduces you; the atmosphere of pure light and love; the Father's own light; the Father's own love. And keep yourselves, as "obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance; but as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy."

II. Look now for a little at the second of the two passages in Ephesians (vi. 12): "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." There is a double view here given of the influence which the wicked one,

with his principalities and powers, exerts. On the one hand, he "rules the darkness of this world." On the other hand, he is "spiritual wickedness in high places."

1. He rules the dark world which lies wholly in him; rules it as the prince of the power of its air, and as the spirit now working in the children of disobedience. If he finds you there, he finds you within his own territory; at once breathing the worldly atmosphere he has mixed; and open at the same time to his influence as he is busy in his vocation, plying all his wiles among those whom he finds harbouring thoughts of insubordination. He has an advantage over you on his own ground; you cannot there cope with him; your only safety is in flight. "Come out and be separate." Flee to the stronghold; "the heavenly places." The wicked one's world is not your home. You are not to know it at all; or to know it only as lying wholly in the wicked one; to beware of it; to renounce it; to keep yourself unspotted from it. Your home is in "the heavenly places," in which "you sit with Christ." Abide there, and "the wicked one toucheth you not."*

2. Nay, but even into "the heavenly places" the wicked one may find access; and even in "the heavenly places" he may seek to touch you. But he does not, he cannot, really touch you there. He crept indeed

* "The heavenly places," or "the heavenlies," is the right rendering of the phrase in all the four connections in which it occurs in the Epistle to the Ephesians, where alone it is found:—i. (ii. 9), as the home of blessing; ii. (i. 20, ii. 6), as the seat of the risen life; iii. (iii. 10), as the theatre of the Divine drama; iv. (vi. 12), as the last retreat in the satanic struggle.

into Paradise, which was "the heavenly places" before the fall; and touched fatally our first parents there. But in "the heavenly places" now,—in your "heavenly places,"—you have a defence which they had not. You "sit with Christ in the heavenly places," being "begotten of God in his Son." You "know that you are of God," in a sense and to an effect that Adam and Eve, with all their innocence, could not realise. By redemption, by adoption, by regeneration; as bought and begotten; you are of God; his own very sons, as Jesus is. The wicked one may come to you in your heavenlies, as he came to them in theirs. He may come as "spiritual wickedness;" plying his old wicked spiritual arts of temptation; suggesting his old doubts of the love and equity and truth of God. But he "touches you not." He could touch you only by appealing to something in you of what he finds in the children of disobedience among whom he works in the world; something in you of their disobedience, some incipient leaning towards insubordination, some aptness to count the commandments of God grievous.

Is there at any time anything of that spirit in you? Is there any rising within you of the old feeling of impatience, of suspicion,—in a word, of unbelief? Ah, then, even "in the heavenlies," you are not safe from the touch of the wicked one. Remember that you have to "wrestle against him even in the heavenlies;" to wrestle against him, not only as "ruling the world's darkness," but as "spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies."

For he comes into the secret place where you dwell with God as his children ; transformed perhaps into an angel of light ; insinuating his old doubts, surmises, questionings again ; putting in his old cavils between your Father's loving heart and your simple trust. Let him not, O my brother ! let him not succeed in his attempt. Stand against him by faith. Bid him begone. He has no right to be in "your heavenlies," whatever right he may have to "rule in the world's darkness." If you have faith you may cast him out. Keep yourself, as "born of God ;" keep yourself in the vivid realising sense of all that your "sitting with Christ in the heavenlies" involves. So keep yourself in the heavenlies, and that wicked one touches you not.

What shall I say, in closing, to you who are not of God, but of the world ; of the world that is altogether lying in the wicked one ? Ah ! do you not know that the prince of the world is judged ; that for this purpose the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil ? Are you still listening to the gospel of the wicked one : "Ye shall not surely die ?" Nay rather, hear another gospel : "God is love ; in this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his Son into the world that we might live through him."

XLV.

KNOWING THE TRUE ONE AND BEING IN HIM.

"And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true; and we are in him that is true, [*even*] in his Son Jesus Christ."*—1 JOHN v. 20.

THIS is the third and last "we know," in these closing verses of the epistle (18-20). John insists, in leaving us, upon our being Gnostics, or knowing ones, as the heretics of his day professed to be; but in a better and safer sense. They affected to be knowing, in the lofty and transcendental region of abstract speculation about the divine nature; whereas John would have us to be knowing, in the humbler yet really higher and holier experience of real, direct, personal acquaintanceship and fellowship with the Divine Being, as coming down to us, poor sinners, in his Son, and taking us up, by his Spirit, to be sons and saints in his holy child Jesus.

That whosoever is born of God sinneth not, because

* There is no occasion for the word "*even*" which our translators have inserted in the last clause of this verse; it is not in the original, as the italics indicate; and it is fitted to mislead. It is apt to suggest the idea that by "him that is true," or "the true one," we are to understand, not God the Father, but the Son of God. Some accordingly have so construed the clause; but as it seems to me unwarrantably. For he who is called "the true one" is expressly distinguished from his Son. "We are in him that is true." How? Through our being "in his Son Jesus Christ."

he keepeth himself so that the wicked one touches him not ; that we are thus of God, in contrast with the world which lies wholly in the wicked one ; these are the two former "we knows." And now the third "we know" has respect, neither to our standing as being of God, nor to the world's position as lying in the wicked one, but to him who causes or occasions the difference, "the Son of God."

It would almost seem as if there was a regular syllogism here ; an argument built up in three propositions ; two premises and a conclusion. First there is the major premis, in the general assertion, abstract and impersonal ; "we know" that being born of God implies not sinning, inasmuch as "he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and the wicked one touches him not." Then there is the minor premis, in the assertion, particular and personal ; "we know" that we individually "are of God," and, therefore, separated from "the world that lieth wholly in the wicked one." The strict logical conclusion would be ; therefore "we know" that we do not sin. John, however, puts it somewhat differently, so as to place our not sinning on a surer footing ; more humbling to us ; more glorifying to God ;—"We know that the Son of God is come."

And yet this is a fair enough inference, and fits well enough into the argument when viewed in its full spiritual import. Nor is it inconsistent with the other. For if he that is born of God sinneth not ; and if we consequently, being of God, sin not, it is all in virtue of "the Son of God being come ;" come, in the first place, to

"give us a knowledge of the True One ;" come, secondly, to secure in that way our "being in the True One."

I. "The Son of God is come, and hath given us understanding, that we may know him that is true," or "the True One." It is God who is to be known ; and he is to be known as "the True One."

The truth here ascribed to God is not truthfulness, as opposed to falsehood ; but reality, as opposed to fiction or imagination. That we may know God, as truly real, as a truly real being, "the Real One,"—strictly speaking, the only truly Real One,—apart from whom all things and persons are shadowy and unreal ; that is, in the first instance, the purpose for which his Son Jesus Christ is come, and "hath given us understanding" or insight "to know him that is true."

The inward working of the Holy Ghost is here assumed, or asserted ; that is the "understanding" or insight that is meant. Jesus Christ coming as the Son of God has given us, not merely new outer light, but a new inner eye ; otherwise even his coming could not make us know "the True One." His coming indeed may be said to be itself the outer light. His coming forth from the True One in whose bosom he dwells reveals the True One to us. But the discovery would be in vain if his coming did not secure to us, as his gift, "understanding to know" the True One when thus revealed. That is, we may say emphatically, his best gift ; the best fruit of his "being come," and of all the travail of soul on our behalf which his "being come" includes in it. For the worst of our miserable state,

from which he is come to save us, is that we have no understanding,—no spiritual sense in us,—by which we can discern and recognise, so as truly to know, him who alone is true. And the best part of his salvation is his giving us that knowledge, not only by revelation from without, but by enlightenment within.

It is a great thing to know God as he is here named —“the True One ;” to know him as true and real ; no imagination or mere idea, but true and real. That, I say, is a very great thing. It is indeed all in all ; the one thing needful. What is God to me ? Ah, momentous question ! And as searching as it is momentous ! Is he true ? Is he real ? Do I apprehend him to be so ?

I know my friend when I see him and take him by the hand. I know him as true and real ; no shadow, no myth, no visionary ghost, but verily real. There he is before me, not a wraith such as Highland seer beholds in the misty vapour,—but invested with unmistakeable, palpable reality. Is God thus ever before me ? Whenever I think of my friend, even when he is out of my sight, I think of him as true and real ; as having a real and actual existence ; a real and actual personality. Do I always thus think of God ? Do I always thus know him ?

There are two conditions of this knowledge.

In the first place, if I am to know any one as true and real, I must have a distinct and well-defined conception of him in my mind. He must present himself to me as having a certain special individuality of his own, marking him out to me as separate from others. I thus

identify him as true and real. But how confused and incoherent is my conception of God apt to be! A number of vague notions about him and his ways may be floating hazily, as it were, before me. But they lack unity, and are therefore unreal. A heap or bundle of attributes, such as I can name, enumerate, and define, may be all that I have for my God. If so, it is a heap or bundle of rags. It has no life, no living personality, no oneness, no reality, no truth. To know any person as real and true, I must know him as one; one living personality; living and true.

But, secondly, can I so know any one otherwise than by personal intercourse and personal acquaintanceship? It is in that way that I know an actual living friend as true. When our eyes meet and our hands join and our tongues exchange words, I know him as true and real. I know him better thus, than when he and I communicate by letter merely, or by message at second-hand. My knowledge of him has in it a truth and reality, a true and vivid realisation, that does not belong to the notion I have of any hero or martyr; however graphic may be the history, however lifelike the picture, by means of which I am to set him before my mind's eye.

Now "the Son of God has come, and given us understanding that we may know the True One;" that we may truly and really know,—know as a living person,—the Father whose Son he is. The very object of his "coming and giving us understanding," is to put truth and reality into our knowledge of God. He does so by bringing God and us personally together. His "coming"

provides for that on the part of God ; his "giving us understanding" provides for it on our part.

It is indeed, I repeat, a great thing thus to know "him that is true ;" to have a true personal knowledge of him ; such as you have of the friend you converse with every day about everything or anything that turns up ;—or of the father to whom you go every day and every hour for deeper counsel or for a passing embrace. The friend, the father, is a reality ; a real and true friend, a real and true father. You feel him to be so. He is no dead, historical personage, exhibited on the stage of the historical drama. He is to you a real and living person : for there is life and reality in your present intercourse with him. And it is that there may be this present living intercourse with God as a living person, that "the Son of God is come," to make that possible on God's side ; "and hath given us an understanding," to make it possible on ours. Only in that way, by his revelation of himself to us in the Son and by our fellowship with him in the Spirit, can we know "him that is true." Only thus can we know God personally ; as "the True One ;" a real person and not a mere abstraction or generalisation.

II. Knowing thus "him that is true," we are "in him." But we are so, only as being "in his Son Jesus Christ." The apostle's statement thus fits into the Lord's own saying, in his farewell prayer, "I in them and thou in me" (John xvii. 23). Both of them rest on that higher appeal which the Lord makes to his Father :—"As thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they

also may be one in us" (ver. 21). Thou in me, I in them, and so thou in them ;—they in me, I in thee, and so they in thee ;—such is the wondrous reciprocal line or chain between God and us. We are in the True One, as being in his Son Jesus Christ, who is himself in him. We are therefore in the True One as his Son Jesus Christ himself is in him.

Thus our being in the True One rests on very sure ground, since it is in his Son Jesus Christ that we are in him. And it implies a very high ideal of what being in the True One means, and what it is.

1. It is in his Son Jesus Christ that we are in the True One. We are in him, not directly or immediately, but by mediation ; through and in a mediator. It is only thus that we can be in God, as the one only living and true God. It must be so. If the God whom our conscience indicates and owns is indeed true and real ; a real, true, living person ; we cannot dream of being in him, in any sense implying rest and peace, or a refuge and home, otherwise than through and in a mediator.

No doubt, if there are many gods, all alike true,—or all alike fabulous, though still imagined to be true,—I may find among them one so congenial that I can conceive of his drawing me into his embrace, so that I may be in him. Or if the only true God is the universe, or universal being ; all things and persons being but his parts ; and all actions and events the unfoldings of his own self-consciousness ;—then necessarily I am in him ; or rather I am he and he is I ;—there is no personal distinction between us. Or if God, admitted to be a real,

true, and living person, is not known by me as such, I may amuse or soothe myself with some name or notion of my being in him, so far as to secure my safety, if I do but say a prayer occasionally, no matter though my saying it is really little better than speaking to vacancy, —addressing idle words to the empty air.

But let me know God as true ; as a reality. Let me be confronted face to face with God, as no far-off vision, but a real, present, living person. Let my inner sense be quickened ; and let there flash from heaven a light making clear as day the features of him in whose real presence I stand. Ah ! what cry escapes me ?—“I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee ; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes !”

Now I see clearly ; now I feel deeply ; the full difficulty of the case. If God is true and real, my sin is true and real ; and I, the sinner, am true and real. Guilt is real. Wrath is real. Judgment is real. Punishment is real.

Ah ! this knowing of the True One, as the True One, by the spiritual understanding which the Son of God is come to give ! It imparts to all things in heaven and earth and hell a terrible distinctness ;—an altogether new air of truth ;—an intense, vivid, burning reality ;—such as I cannot long stand without being maddened, if I am to stand alone ; a real sinner before a real God.

For me to be in him ! How utterly hopeless ! Nay, but let me consider. Who is he who has come to give me understanding thus to know the True One ? The Son of God ; his Son Jesus Christ. It is he who by his

coming makes the True One known as he really is ; for he is himself " the image of the invisible God." It is he who by his Spirit gives me understanding that I may know the True One. And placing himself between the True One, whom now at last I truly know, and me, whom that knowledge must otherwise utterly appal,—he, the very Son of this True One, his Son Jesus Christ, calls me to himself ; to be one with him ; to be " in him." It is not that he would again hide the True One from me, or hide me from the True One. No. But he makes it possible for me, if I will but consent to be in him, to be " in the True One," as he is himself in the True One.

For he says, I am a reality ; the real Son of God, really come to you, in your real flesh. As his true and very Son, I give you understanding to know him who is true and very God. And in me you know him, not so as to be a castaway from him ; but so as to be in him, as I am in him. For in me, whatever in you might seem to stand in the way, and did stand in the way, of your being in the True One, is met and obviated. In the Son of God, his Son Jesus Christ, you can be in God, known as the True One, and can have perfect peace.

Out of Christ, I can have peace only by not knowing truly the True One, not knowing him as he is,—or by keeping away from him among the trees of the garden, and under the veil of some apron of fig-leaves. Satan belies him to me, and I hide or cover myself from him. But there is no need now of guile, or concealment, or disguise ; no room for evasion or compromise. The True One may be truly known, and I, the chief of

sinners, may be in him, truly known as the True One, "in his Son Jesus Christ."

2. If it is thus that in his Son Jesus Christ we are in the True One, it is after a high ideal or model that we are so. For our being in the True One in his Son Jesus Christ, must be after the manner of his Son Jesus Christ's being himself in him. What a manner of being in the True One is that! What truth, what reality is there in it!

I would keep fast hold of the apostle's ground-thought or leading idea in this passage; which is truth, reality, fact. There are other views that may be taken of the Son of God, his Son Jesus Christ, being in the True One, as the type and model, as well as the cause, of our being in the True One in him. But I fix on this one as chiefly relevant here; "we are in the True One in his Son Jesus Christ;" and therefore in him as truly as his Son Jesus Christ is in him. How truly then, how really, is his Son Jesus Christ in him!

His Son Jesus Christ! For it is not his Son, as being in him from everlasting, that is here presented to us. It is with his Son as "being come," that we have to do. It is in his Son Jesus Christ as "being come," that we are in the True One. Let us look well and see how his Son Jesus Christ is in the True One; how, in the days of his flesh, "he is in him that is true!" How truly, really, thoroughly! How naturally too! He is in his native element when he is in the True One.

Who that ever followed Jesus in his earthly life could for a moment doubt that God was to him a reality,

and that his being in God was a reality too? It was a true God that he served; and he himself was truly in him. My Father! he is ever saying; and so saying it as to show that it is a real and true Father he means; and that he is really and truly in him, as a real and true Son. Yes! his Son Jesus Christ is truly in the True One; never out of him; never away from him; never at home but with him; never thinking a thought, or feeling an emotion, that he did not think and feel in him; never speaking a word or doing a work but as having his Father with him. Truly, all through his real and true humiliation, and obedience, and sacrifice, "he is in him that is true;" in him, with a depth and intensity of real inness, if I may use the word, that the devout study of a lifetime will not suffice to fathom. Nay, the devout study of eternity will not suffice to exhaust the full truth of that ineffable complacency of the Everlasting Father of which his Son Jesus Christ, for his obedience unto the death in our stead even more than for his original relation to him, has become the object.

Yes! "I in thee" says Jesus, as he leaves the world and goes to the Father. Oh! that word "I in thee!" What a word, as spoken then and there! Who can understand its significance, its intense reality, its living truth? "I in thee!"

Can it be that I, a sinner, of sinners the chief, am to be in the True One as his Son Jesus Christ is thus in him? It must be so, at least in measure, if it is in his Son Jesus Christ that I am to be in the True One. My

being in the True One must be after the model and manner of his being in the True One. It must at all events be as real and true as that. To me, as to him, God must be a reality ; and my being in God must be a reality too.

Is this too high an aim ? Does it seem to be beyond my reach ? Nay, let me look again at the way in which God comes down to me that I may rise to him. "Thou in me ; I in them," is the language of the Son. So "he that is true," the True One, first condescends to us. He is in the Son, in his Son Jesus Christ ; all his fulness dwells in him bodily ;—"Thou in me." And the Son is in us ;—"I in them." The Holy Spirit takes of what is his and shows it to us ; he forms Christ in us. So the Father, the True One, comes down to us ; he in Christ ; Christ in us. Let Christ then be in us. Let us open our hearts to him. Let us welcome, receive, embrace him ; and the Father in him. Then we are in the Son as the Son is in the Father. "We are in him that is true, in his Son Jesus Christ our Lord."

Let me make a twofold practical appeal, in two opposite directions.

1. If you will not know the True One now, by the understanding which the Son of God is come to give ;—know him so as to be in him, in his Son Jesus Christ ;—the day is coming when you must be compelled, by another sort of awakening, to know the True One ; and to know him terribly as a reality—as a real God dealing with a real sinner about real sin !

Here, for a little longer, God may be to you as if he

were not. You may live on as you would live if he were not ; almost as if, like the fool, you said in your heart, There is no God. You may live as you would live if you believed God to be no real being at all, but a mere creature of the imagination ; like a character in fiction ; an airy nothing. Have you no apprehension that it may be far otherwise soon ? It will not always be possible for you thus to ignore God. For he exists.

Yes ! He does indeed exist. You may find that out to your cost sooner than you think ; too soon for you. It is a great fact, however little you may make of it, or it may make of you. Were it not better for you to know it now ; to take account of it now ; to accommodate yourselves to it now ? "It is hard for you to kick against the pricks." The Son of God is come to make God known to you now, in all his glorious reality, as "light" and "love." He gives you understanding now that you may thus "know God." Better surely that, than to go on darkly, as in a dream, until there comes a shock. And lo ! there is God ! No shadow, but too truly real ! And there is the Son of God ; real also ; too truly real ! "Behold he cometh with clouds ; and every eye shall see him ; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." Yes ! God, and the Son of God, are realities then, when men "hide themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains, and say to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. For the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand ?" (Rev. vi. 15-17.)

2. Let me remind you who believe of the main end for which John would have you to "know the True One, and be in him, in his Son Jesus Christ." It is that "you may not sin;" that you may "keep yourselves so that the wicked one, in whom the whole world lieth, may not touch you." Mark the contrast here. The world lieth wholly in the wicked one; you are in the True One; in God truly known, in his Son Jesus Christ. Let that contrast be ever vividly realised by you. It is your great and only security. Look well to it that your being in the True One, in his Son Jesus Christ, is a reality. Let it be a true experience. Be evermore "dwelling in the secret place of the Most High, and abiding under the shadow of the Almighty." "Let him cover thee with his feathers, for under his wings you may trust." Is it not his Son Jesus Christ who thus addresses you — "Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the Most High thy habitation, there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling!"

XLVI.

JESUS THE TRUE GOD AND ETERNAL LIFE
AGAINST ALL IDOLS.

"This is the true God and [the] eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols."—1 JOHN v. 20, 21.

THE Lord Jesus Christ is the person here meant. Such seems to be the fair inference from the use of the pronoun "this;"—which naturally and usually indicates the nearest person spoken of in the context;—and therefore, in this instance, not "him that is true," but "his Son Jesus Christ."

That inference indeed is so clear, in a merely grammatical and exegetical point of view, that there would not probably have been any doubt about it, were it not for its implying an assertion of our Lord's supreme divinity; an assertion which no sophistry or special pleading can evade or explain away. It is true that some who strongly hold that doctrine have professed, on critical considerations, to take the same view which the deniers of it take. But there is room for suspecting that they have been half-unconsciously influenced by a sort of chivalrous desire to concede debatable ground, rather than by a strict regard to the real merits of the question. It is a forced construction only that can get us past "his Son Jesus Christ," so as to send us back to him whose

Son he is. Certainly the simple and natural reading of the words is, that "he who is come and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true,"—he in whom "we are in him that is true,"—"his Son Jesus Christ,"—is "the true God, and eternal life."

He is "the true God," and as such he is "eternal life," or rather the eternal life. It is our realisation of him in that character, as "the true God and the eternal life," which constitutes our best and only security against idolatry,—the idolatry which John exhorts us in his closing admonition to shun ;—"Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

"This is the true God and the eternal life." First, he is the true God. That may be said of each of the three persons in the Godhead separately, as well as of the "three in one" unitedly, "the Triune." The entire Godhead, in all its reality and fulness, is in each one of the persons ; each therefore is in himself really and verily "the true God." The mystery of the Holy Trinity involves this seeming paradox. But there is a peculiar significance in the Son's being thus designated here. He is "the Son of God" who "is come ;" come in the flesh by water and blood ; attested by the Spirit as come by water and blood ; giving us an understanding that we may know the True One, and in him and with him may be in the True One. In that character and capacity, and with a view to these functions, he is declared to be "the true God." Again, secondly, in the same character and capacity, and with a view to the same functions, he is declared to be "eternal life," or "the eternal life."

Eternal life ! How much is there in this little phrase ! It suggests the ever awful idea of endless duration ; existence, if not from everlasting, yet to everlasting ; conscious existence running on for ever. But that is the least part of its meaning. The manner, rather than the term or duration, of the life is indicated ; not so much the continuance of the life, as its kind, its character, its nature. It is life independent of time and its changes ; of earth and its history ; of the created universe itself. It is the life that God lives as the True One ; in himself, from himself, for or to himself. His Son Jesus Christ is "this eternal life." As being "the true God," he is so. As the true God he is the eternally living one ; in such sense the eternally living one that all who are in him are eternally living ones as he is himself. If I am one with him, then as he is "the eternal life," so also am I in him. My own life is not eternal. In a sense, indeed, it is so, as regards its duration, for it is to have no end. But it is not, as to its character, eternal life. On the contrary, it is eternal death. The life which I have naturally is the life of a doomed criminal, sentenced to perpetual servitude ; bound over to penal suffering for the entire period of his existence. Such is the eternal death, of which the eternal life is the opposite. For that is the life which he who dooms the criminal to perpetual servitude has himself ; the very life of him who binds the criminal over to penal suffering for ever. It must be, therefore, as being "the true God," that Jesus Christ is "the eternal life." He is so, and can only be so, as being one with that right-

eous Father whose judicial condemnation of us is our eternal death.

But if so, must not his being "the eternal life" be eternal death to us? Not so. For if, on the one hand, he is one with "him that is true," being his Son, and therefore, like his Father, "the eternal life,"—he is one, on the other hand, with us, as his Son Jesus Christ. He becomes, with us and for us, "the eternal death" which is our portion and characteristic ;—which indeed we are, for it is our very nature. As he shares always his father's eternal life, so he shares once for all our eternal death ; takes it as his ; makes it his own. Yes ; he dies our eternal death, that we may live his eternal life. Not otherwise, even as "the true God," could he be, in any sense that could be available for us, "the eternal life;" not otherwise than by being "made sin" and "made a curse" for us ; which means his taking upon himself as his our "eternal death."

And let it be well noted that not even his being thus made sin and made a curse for us ; not even his becoming our partner and our substitute, in our eternal death ; could have been of any benefit to us, or of any use, but for his being, in that very act and experience, "the true God," and as such "the eternal life." It is his being "the true God" that alone can make that eternal death terminable in his case, which it cannot be in ours. His becoming our eternal death for us must involve him in its terrible endlessness, but for his being still in himself "the true God," and as such "the eternal life." We cannot die the eternal death and yet live ; but he can ;

because he is "the true God and the eternal life." Therefore he says, "I am he that liveth and was dead ; and behold I am alive for evermore;" and again he says, "Because I live ye shall live also."

I have died your eternal death that I may share with you my eternal life. I can share with you this eternal life of mine, for it is as the true God that I have it ;— "I am the true God and the eternal life." It is as the true God that I am the eternal life; as the true God ; truly and verily the Son of "him that is true." For "this eternal life" is to know him and to be in him. I am the eternal life because I know him and am in him; being, as I am, myself "the true God." Were I not so, were I anything less than that,—I might tell you about the eternal life; I might unfold it to you; I might show you the way to it. But I could not myself be that eternal life to you. I could not say to you, that having me you have the eternal life. But I do say that. I give you the assurance that having me you have the eternal life; that being in me you are in the eternal life. All that you can imagine of peace, rest, joy; pure and holy love; perfect, endless, uninterrupted blessedness and glory;—and whatever else you may connect with that most pregnant phrase "the eternal life;"—you have it all when you have me; you are in it all when you are in me. For, all that I am to the Father you are to the Father; all that I have from the Father you have from the Father; all that the Father is to me the Father is to you. Thus I am, for you and to you, "the true God and the eternal life."

This statement about Christ,—his being “the true God and the eternal life,”—has a very intimate connection with what is said of him as being come to give us knowledge of his Father, as the True One, and to secure our being in his Father, as the True One, in virtue of our being in him (ver. 20). And viewed in that light, it explains the earnest, emphatic, and affectionate appeal with which John closes his epistle:—“Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (ver. 21).

I. He “is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true;” and, so coming, he is “the true God and the eternal life.” In him the true God becomes really true to us. In his person God stands forth before our eyes as a reality, and is felt in our inmost hearts to be a reality. This is what we need and often crave for; that the true and living God should be to us, not a notion, but a reality. He is so to us, and is so known by us, in the person of his Son Jesus Christ, because his Son Jesus Christ is “the true God and eternal life.” We need not seek elsewhere for what we want. We may “keep ourselves from idols.”

For what is the use of an idol? What is the design and aim of those who frame or fancy visible images of the invisible God,—grotesque figures, in wood, or stone, or metal; the heavenly orbs; deified heroes; personified divine attributes and influences? Is it not to bring God more within the range of their actual and sensible apprehension than otherwise he would be, and so to have him before them as a true and palpable reality?

The idols are real, and, in a sense, even living. The hideous, misshapen block before which yonder dark Hindoo bows and worships has for him a certain real life, akin to his own. The beasts so sacred in old Egypt's eyes were real and living emblems of divine powers and qualities of some sort. The suns and stars on which rapt Chaldaean gazed had a real and living significancy, as representative of deity. The men and women whom a more earthly superstition turned into gods and goddesses were real and living flesh and blood while on earth, and continued to be to their votaries much the same when they were gone. Even the strange, dreamy, mysterious spiritualities, with which the early heretics and Gnostic corrupters of Christianity peopled the divine fulness; the divine essences and emanations which they named as in some sense persons; had for their imaginative minds a living reality that they could grasp and feel. These last were the idols of John's day, within the church; from which, even more than from grosser idols outside, it concerned him to warn "his little children to keep themselves." They were the forerunners, as his prophetic eye partly saw, of idols still more seductive, with which Christendom was to be ere long tried; canonised martyrs and saints, with their images and pictures and relics; and high over all, alone in her glory, the blessed Virgin.

Now all these idolatries, however widely differing in their nature, and in their effects upon their devotees, have this principle in common, that they are all attempts to give actual form and substance,—true and living em-

bodiment and realisation, as it were,—to men's conceptions of deity; those conceptions which otherwise are apt to be so indistinct, indefinite, misty, shadowy, as to be for the most part practically all but uninfluential. They bring what is divine within the range and grasp of humanity. The abstract becomes personal; the ideal becomes real. The infinite takes the clear and sharp outline of a form or a face that can be pictured to the mind's eye at least, if not to that of the body. And what is apt to be little more than a great blank vacancy, becomes instinct with living personality.

Hence, even for refined natures, the more refined kinds of idol-worship have a strong fascination;—witness the hold which Mariolatry has over intellects the highest and hearts the tenderest and purest.

It is indeed the crown and masterpiece of idolatry—this worship of the Virgin. Fairer, holier, more lovely and lovable idol was never formed or fancied. Never idol like her,—the ideal mother of our Lord.

I say the ideal mother of our Lord. For it is an idealised Mary that is idolised.

And yet we see and can understand how intensely real, even as thus idealised, she is and must be to her believing worshippers. In her they feel that they have a real mother, a real sister,—a true and very woman; with all of woman's warm love and none of woman's weakness. And she has to them divinity about her, being, as they put it, "the mother of God." That Mary, thus ideal and yet real, should be adored and loved, chivalrously and yet devoutly, with human passion rising

into divine enthusiasm, is so far from seeming to me strange, that I doubt if any of us have not sometimes had some secret sympathy, if not with the superstitious homage, at least with the frame of mind that prompts it.

I take this highest instance of the charm that there is in idolatry, because it comes nearest to what John puts as a safeguard against it. The virgin-mother of our Lord is alone in the created universe of God. No other being ever has occupied, or ever can occupy, the same position with her. She stands in a relation to Deity altogether peculiar ; absolutely singular. It is a natural thought that she may be invoked as well as her Son ; nay, that she may be invoked instead of her Son ; as, in fact, a most persuasive pleader with her Son. And she grows to be so very true and real, as a genuine woman, kind and pitying and relenting ; while her divine Son, as well as his heavenly Father, fades away in the dim distance of a sort of undefined and misty majesty ; that knowing her, as it seems, so thoroughly and personally, one is fain to rest in her, and leave all to her, and be satisfied with her as virtually all in all. And it must be so, if we take her as our mediator. For she is not "the true God and eternal life." She is, when thus viewed, simply an idol. Now no idol brings us into communication with God as true and real. We accept the idol as real ; but God, whose image he may profess to be,—between whom and us he ought to mediate,—is as unreal as ever, or more so. The virgin-mother I know ; in her I can lie. But as for the Son and the Father, I look to her to deal with them for me. To me they are but names.

Nothing like that can happen when he through whom I am to know God truly, is himself, as his Son Jesus Christ, "the true God and the eternal life." He is as human as is his virgin-mother. He is, as much as she is, a real and living human person ; as truly set before me as such. Nay, I have him, as a real and living person, more clearly and fully, with more of personal individuality, in my mind's eye, than ever I can have her.

The notices of Mary are few and far between ; vague also and indefinite. We have nothing beyond the merest generalities to give us a notion of what sort of woman she was. But her divine Son, the Son of the Highest, the Son of the True One, his Son Jesus Christ,—is as a living man amongst us,—a real person. He is more truly, vividly, intensely real to us than even his mother Mary. And if more so than she, then more by far than any saints or martyrs that ever were canonised ; any heroes that ever were deified ; any representatives of deity, dead or alive, that ever were worshipped ; any effluxes or emanations of deity that the highest imagination ever invested with the property of personality. Yes ; here is Jesus Christ the Son of God, truly, vividly, intensely real ; a real and living person ; going in and out among us ; one of whom we can really form a truer, fuller, more intimate conception, than we can form of our dearest and most familiar associate and intimate ; whose hand we clasp in ours more really, because more inwardly, than we can clasp the hand of any friend ; with whom we can talk more confidentially than we can with any brother. Here he is. And it is through and

in him that I am to "know God as the True One." He is to represent God to me ; it is with him that I have directly and immediately to do ; in him I am to know "the True One."

But does not this arrangement really put aside "the True One," and substitute in his stead "his Son Jesus Christ?" Doubtless he is the best possible or conceivable substitute. But still, is it not a substitution? Does it not tend in the direction of making Jesus Christ, the Son of "the True One," the real and living "True One" to me ; while God, his Father, the absolute and ultimate "True One," becomes to me a dim and far-off vision? Is there no danger of idolatry here? Am I not on the point of falling into that sin, by setting him up instead of God? And is not that equivalent to making him an idol?

It has been so often ; and it would be so always ; were it not for the great and blessed fact that he is "the true God and the eternal life." But I cannot make an idol of him if I believe that. I cannot worship him in an idolatrous manner, or after an idolatrous fashion, if I really own him as being "the true God and the eternal life," and in that view take in the full meaning of his own words : "Whosoever hath seen me hath seen the Father."

Is it not a blessed thing to know that there can be no idolatry in your closest fellowship with Jesus, if only you bear in mind that he is "the true God and the eternal life?" Your warmest love to him, your most familiar intercourse with him, your most affectionate clinging

to him, your most tender and trusting embrace of him, never can be idolatry ;—for he is “the true God and the eternal life.” You need have no fear of your making too much of him, or making an idol of him ; as you must have in the case of any other being, real or imaginary, whom you let in between God and you ; for “he is the true God and the eternal life.” You may admire others to excess, but you never can admire him to excess ; for “he is the true God and the eternal life.” You may be too devoted to others, but you can never be too devoted to him ; for “he is the true God and the eternal life.”

What ease and freedom may this thought impart to all your dealings with him, as come especially to “give you an understanding that you may know the True One ;” that you may know him as true and real.

The most perfect of God’s creatures, the highest angel, if he had come on such an errand, must have bid you look away from him. You may listen to my voice, he might say ; you may hear what I have to tell you about God. I will do my best to set him before you as a reality, in as lifelike a representation as I can give. But beware of fixing your eyes too much, or indeed at all, on me. You may imagine that I am so like him, as living so near him and seeing so much of him, that when you have formed a clear notion of me you really know him. But it is not so ; it is far otherwise. Your very knowledge of me may mislead you as to him ; tempting you to form inadequate, if not erroneous, conceptions of him ; to enshrine him in my frame and clothe him in

my vesture ; the frame and vesture of a mere creature at the best.

But no such caution is needed on the part of Jesus ; for he is the true God and the eternal life. Therefore let not Jesus, the Son of God, be a name or a notion to you ; if he is so, much more will God his Father be so. Let him be a true, present, living reality. Be sitting at his feet as really as did Mary of Bethany. Be welcoming him to your house and table as really as did Zaccheus. Be leaning on his bosom as really as did John. Be grasping his hand, when you are sinking in the stormy sea, as really as did Peter when he cried, Lord, save me, I perish. You may do so with all safety, and with no risk of idolatry ; for he is "the true God and the eternal life."

II. But not only are we "in his Son Jesus Christ so as to know him that is true," we are to be "in him so as to be in him that is true." In that view also it is all-important thoroughly to apprehend and feel that "he is the true God and the eternal life." For were he not so, we could not really be in the True One by being in him. Nay, our being in him, so far from a help, might be a hindrance. We might be in the True One through him, but scarcely in him, unless he were himself "the true God and the eternal life."

This word "in," be it observed, though small in size, is very great in significancy. It denotes a very close, real, and personal connection ; and indeed almost, as it were, an identification ;—so much so that it may be

said to be as impossible for me to be in the True One, and at the same time to be in any one else who is not "the true God and the eternal life,"—as it is for me to serve two masters, to serve God and Mammon. For what is this "inness," if I may so say, when it is spoken of a real and living person to whom I may sustain real and personal relations? Surely at the very least it implies that I give myself up entirely to him, and become wholly his. I consent to his taking me to be one with himself. It is a real unity, corresponding in its nature and character to the nature and character of him in whom I am; but still real; and intimate as real; so intimate as to be engrossing, absorbing, exclusive. He in whom I am is to me all in all. In a sense, I lose myself in him. I have no separate standing from him. I see, as it were, through his eyes; I judge with his understanding; I make his will my will; I make himself my supreme good, and my chiefest joy.

Now if, in any such sense, I am in one who is not "the true God and the eternal life,"—can that be compatible with my being also "in him that is true?"

It is not needful here to suppose that it is an enemy of God in whom I thus am, and with whom I am thus identified. The case is better put when he is supposed to be a friend of God. For then I look to him to deal with God for me. I am in him as being his; so thoroughly his, that I have nothing of my own; I myself am not my own. He has made me part and parcel of his own very self. It belongs to him to make terms with God for himself;—and for me as being in

him. He has to do with God ; not I. So it must be with me, if he in whom I am is not "the true God and the eternal life ;" if he and the True One are separate and distinct ; if he and the Father are not one. The higher he is, the nearer he is to God, the more does my "being in him" supersede and supplant my "being in God."

But Jesus Christ is "the true God and the eternal life." I may be "in him," as much as ever I choose, as much as ever I can ; his own good Spirit helping me ; the more the better. For "in him I am in the True One." In the Son I am in the Father, even as he is in the Father. And all this is so, because "he is the true God and the eternal life."

It could not otherwise be so. I could not be in him as I long to be in him, without being not in, but out of, the True One, were he not himself "the true God and the eternal life." For how do I long to be in him, if I am at all awakened to a sense of what I am in myself? How do I long to be in Christ? How thoroughly would I be hidden, and as it were, swallowed up in him! A poor, naked, shelterless, child of sin and wrath, shrinking from the presence of "him that is true,"—shrinking from the glance of his true eye and the searching scrutiny of his true judgment,—ah! how fain would I be lost and merged altogether in that holy, righteous, loving Saviour, who has come to answer for me ; to take my place ; to fulfil my righteousness ; to bear my guilt ; to die for me, and yet live, so that I may live in him. Oh! to be in him ; shut up into him ; lost and

merged altogether, I repeat, in him ; and because lost and merged in him, therefore also safe in him.

Safe? From whom? From the True One? Am I to be in his Son Jesus Christ so as to be away from himself? No. For he in whom I am is "the true God and the eternal life." Therefore, being in him, I am in the True One, "in him that is true."

I would be in Christ incarnate. I would be in Christ crucified. I must be in Christ both incarnate and crucified. I must be in him as he becomes bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. I must be in him as dying, yet not "given over to death," but rising again ; the living one ; who, having once died, dieth no more ; who living, though he was dead, liveth for ever. I would be, I must be, thus in Christ. Is it as against God? Is it as if I were to be out of and away from God the True One? No! Emphatically no! For he in whom I am is himself "the true God and the eternal life."

"Little children, keep yourselves from idols." And let this be the test or criterion of what an idol is. Whatever worship or fellowship or companionship,—whatever system or society,—whatever work or way,—whatever habit or pursuit or occupation,—is of such a sort in itself, or has such influence over you, that you cannot be in it and at the same time be in God, or that you may be in it and yet not be in God,—as little children in a loving Father,—that to you is idolatry, be the object of your regard what it may. From all such

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idols keep yourselves. And that you may keep yourselves from them all, abide evermore in the Son of God, your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To be in him is your only security,—to be always “found in him.” For to be in him is to be in the Father, even as he is in the Father. And there can be no idolatry in that.

THE END.

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